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Chivalry Peak

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CHIVALRY PEAK

BY

IRVIN S. COBB

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ILLUSTRATIONS

*He broke off, mindful of the pledge that neither
should refer to the misdeeds which had
thrust them together Frontispiece*

*“Pass the word to the rest of our people to keep
their eyes open and their mouths shut” .*
Facing page 74

*“You treated me as though I were your chattel
to be done with as you pleased,” said Joan*
Between pages 284 and 285

Chivalry Peak

CHIVALRY PEAK

I

Genesis

IN the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Next was created by Him the firmament and all. Then, after the lapse of several periods and ages—scientists and theologians disagreeing as to the approximate number and durations of these—He created Mr. Herbert Tendon; and then it might be said that the works of the Almighty, in so far as this small planet was concerned, had culminated in at least one thing finished and perfect.

Here no cheap impiety is meant or implied. It merely is an attempt to suggest the feeling and effect which by his daily walk and conversation Mr. Herbert Tendon conveyed to those favored mortals with whom he had contact. His manner was more than pontifical; it suggested infallibility, yes, omnipotence. The suggestion was in no way abated or lessened by the fact that constantly he bowed down and worshiped before

his own image. Rather it was as though Mr. Tendon tended the altar fires of his greatness and trimmed candles and burned incense before the shrine, only because in all the land he could find none other worthy of these high offices. He was, in short, one of those persons! He was perhaps as rounded out and as complete a type of those persons as our civilization has produced.

The hold-up on the Klamath, Cascades & Pacific Slope Railway deserved commemoration chiefly for the reason that he was the principal victim of that outrage. But what the world at large never knew was that for one short space of time, under the spell of a mighty fear, he changed from Tendon the self-advertiser, Tendon the financial wonder-worker, Tendon the overpowering wizard among the promoters, Tendon of Wall Street—branches in several principal cities—to a tremulous, scared small man whose voice shrank and quavered in his throat, whose hands just could perform their master's bidding.

For Mr. Tendon was really a small man. A main marvel about him was that while bodily so meager he managed to produce the sense of supreme majesty which usually in the popular mind is associated with bulk. His courtiers—his secretary for one, his valet for another—and some of his associates liked to call him the Little Giant, speaking with an inflection on

the noun which made a compliment of the tide. What they meant to have you believe was that this gentleman was mentally all the more gigantic for being rather undersized and spindly. What they did not have to proclaim—for this would be evident—was that wherever he went and wherever he stood—in his office, in his home-town of New York or abroad—he took the eye and by virtue of the dominant forces radiating from within he filled the vicinage. If there were twenty men in a crowd he inevitably was the first one. Sometimes he seemed to be the remaining nineteen as well. Their minor personalities would be swallowed up in his.

For example, Mr. Tendon had spent in a town called Gateway one day less than two weeks and today was leaving, but within those two weeks he met and captivated and overwhelmed all and sundry of consequence in and about this town of Gateway. Like Cæsar, and yet in a regard unlike him, he came, he was seen, he had conquered. For one thing, he appealed to the spirit of the people there. The South asks you who you are and the East wants to know how much have you got, but the question of the West is—what can you do? And Mr. Tendon meant to do a great deal for Gateway where it sat, a busy, ambitious, vainglorious, bustling county-seat, part lumber-town and part cow-town, with the Cascades hump-

ing up behind it, and the cattle ranges and the dry prairie flattened down in front of it. Geographically Gateway lies far along and over on the sundown side of this hemisphere, but figuratively she faces the dawn. There's a something in the air out there! The West in places remains different from the rest of the country, not alone in its physical characteristics but in its temperament. The birds show it, even those birds which are nationally distributed. Past the Rockies the bluebird loses his crimson breast; the common meadow-lark isn't common any more except as to numbers, or commonplace either; for now he has a greater size and a freer, finer song than his Corn Belt cousin; and the flicker may not properly be called by his other name of yellowhammer, since the shafts of his wings make twin fans of burnished bright red instead of being golden; also he has about him a deep-woods wildness such as his Eastern cousins, feeding in chicken-yards and nesting in fence-posts, never exhibit. And the birds' human neighbors have their distinctive native coloration too. The battalionizing influence which has made so many mid-continental communities as like as like still spares certain areas beyond the Divide.

Now Gateway was—and to a certain extent is—a Western town with a particular Western individuality of its own, being typical and yet unlike. In itself it is

not pretty to look upon, but its surroundings are so noble, so gorgeously picturesque, that you think of it as a dull pebble in a jeweled setting or perhaps as a smudged tintype mounted within a most lovely carved frame. Cutthroat River comes bending and tumbling and sliding right down through the middle of town, and neither the stockpens on its banks in the older part of town nor the planing mills on its banks in the newer part can quite spoil the beauty of its vistas. It has—the town, not the river—two essential and identifying smells: a mingled smell of cows and sheep, which rises from the loading chutes along the railroad siding above the station, but a tonic smell of cut fir and pine, which comes off the yards of the lumber companies lying farther east on the little ridge between the river and the rails.

There is no servant class, no beggar class, practically no pauper class. Amusements are limited in scope, but the adjacent scenery is limitless for variety and splendor. There is in the dry season more dust underfoot and in clear weather more fresh, high, sweet, pure air overhead than you possibly could conceive of unless you had been there. With hundreds of acres over which to spread, the houses insist on huddling in toward the crowded little municipal hub. Other characteristic paradoxes and contradictions abound.

In one or two sure regards though, Gateway is of a pattern with ninety-nine percent of her sister towns between Canada and the Rio Grande. She has yearnings to grow and the will to cooperate and aid in all worthy local or state-wide undertakings. At the time of this telling, the leading men and women among her residents were especially uplifted. To them Mr. Tendon had borne a big and heart-stirring prospect. Briefly, his intent was to redeem the desert. And, let Heaven be the judge, there was plenty of desert to be redeemed!

The project was not exactly original with Mr. Tendon, but it had taken his clairvoyant touch to revivify it. From the time almost of the coming of the first settlers, before Gateway had a charter or a name and was still only a camp where water and down-timber might easily be had, a few people had talked of the day when the prodigal flow of Cutthroat River would be caught up and impounded here among the uplands to irrigate the waste-lands across the arid valley eastward. Once, years before, a company had been formed to accomplish this thing, but for lack of funds among the organizers and for lack of vision among the prospective beneficiaries, it failed. It was so hard then to make the unimaginative run of the human herd behold orchards heavy with fruit and alfalfa rippling in the wind where their heat-puckered eyes

were accustomed to look upon unreeling daunting miles of gray sage and gnomish junipers and empty tousled earth. Later times and abundant examples before them of what dykes and reservoirs and canals had done for more desolate 'Sahas than theirs brought understanding, but leadership was lacking, capital was lacking, and most of all there were problems of mechanics which in the opinion of divers experts might altogether be unsolvable.

The Moses who came among them to smite the rock of their difficulty and make it gush forth floods of promise was this Mr. Herbert Tendon, no less. He did not come without prior notice. His letters to the secretary of the Gateway Chamber of Commerce stirred the interest of the populace as a stick twisted in a bumblebees' nest stirs up the bees and sets them buzzing. Privately, it seemed, members of his corps of engineers had investigated the physics of the situation. To him they reported back that the riddle which had balked the pioneer exploiters could, with modern formulas, be mastered.

Eastern capital as all men knew was looking to the West for chance of beneficent development—beneficent but of course profitable. Mr. Tendon had control of such capital—his own and the funds of other Eastern financiers who trusted in his judgment and his wide experience in promotion projects, and who

stood ready, indeed anxious, to make him the steward of their dividend-seeking dollars. So and thus he wrote. For himself, let it be said that he made no claims of being a philanthropist. He was, first, last and all the time, a faithful business man. But if, while earning money for himself and his fellow investors, he might at the same time be the instrumentality of bringing opportunities for prosperity and happiness to a considerable number of his countrymen, of adding to the native resources of his beloved nation—well, in short, why not? Or words to that effect; craftily chosen, alluring, seductive words, all of them.

Mr. Tendon expected to arrive in Gateway on or about a certain date, accompanied by his personal staff and by one or more of his confrères. He would remain for approximately two weeks looking over the ground, as the saying was, and meeting the representative citizens. The scheme, he added, was not pitched on an altogether selfish basis. On the part of local investors participation in the proposed Cutthroat River Lands Reclamation Corporation would be accepted, in fact would be welcomed as essential to good will and a full measure of cooperation. No offering, however small, would be declined merely because of its smallness; the stock was to be marketed in hundred-dollar units and fractions

thereof for the express benefit of those of modest means. Upon this point Mr. Tendon in his preliminary conferences with his associates in New York positively had insisted.

True to these advance notices, he reached Gateway, traveling in a private car, on the fourth of September. In the ensuing days, all of Gateway had flocked to the station to see that private car in its parking on a spur, the shy ones to study its contours from without, the more daring to seek admission, and under escort of a proudly smiling black chef to view its interior glories, its staterooms, its luxurious lounge, its shower-bath, its snug but wisely appointed galley and pantry. Instead of cruising up one side of Hood Street and down another as formerly, promenading pairs of young people now invariably made a side tour to the tracks.

While the masses were doing this, the Chamber of Commerce was giving a dinner in Mr. Tendon's honor and was sponsoring public assemblages in his behalf and in furtherance of his benign purposes, and various prominent men—and their wives—were entertaining him as a guest at their homes. If it had occurred to any of the Gateway home-folks, excepting only Mr. Launcelot Dore, timekeeper at Mackall & May's mills—who being English naturally would do so—to think of a fortnight as a fortnight, that one would have

thought of this as the most important and the most crowded and the most jubilant fortnight Gateway in all its history ever had known. Under such stimulus, the editor of the Gateway Weekly Courier became a regular adjective-sot; got reeling drunk on his own superlatives.

II

Idealists Versus Practical Men

AT nine o'clock on the morning of the seventeenth, it being a Sabbath Day, Dave Loomis, general factotum of the Occidental, entered the lobby and sounded a warning. Mr. Loomis might be merely the man-of-all-jobs at a three-dollar-a-day, American-plan hotel, but that he had his protean gifts there was no denying. When he took off his coat he unmistakably and avowedly was the porter and behaved as such. When he put it on again to act as occasional relief for the clerk, he put on with it a mien to suit the rôle. For bellboy, for substitute pantry helper, for general kitchen roustabout, for special waiter, he had in each case a distinct and befitting pose. But he reached his loftiest histrionic heights when he became, as twice a day he did, the combination train-caller and bus driver. These were his proudest hours.

Adjusting to his head the badged cap of authority, he came in off the street where he had been stevedoring outgoing luggage and from near the front doorway chanted his tidings as follows:

"All erboard, passengers and baggage, for Train Number One, northbound over the Klamath, Cascades & Pacific Slope Railway, leavin' at 9:32 from Gateway Union Terminal for Pekawa Junction and all way-stations on root! Connectin' at Pekawa with Transcontinental Flier for Chicago and intermediate points East! Last call! Occidental Hotel automobile bus startin' in one minute! All erbo-o-o-ord!"

In form, Mr. Loomis ran true to his environment. There was but a single steam-line entering Gateway, and it only a jerk-water connecting line at that, yet invariably he named it in full as though to warn green travelers of the perils of becoming confused in some vast and clamorous train-shed. There was but one daily train out, as likewise there was but one daily train in, and of necessity it plied in a northerly direction, yet always Mr. Loomis gave to it an official number and a specified destination. As for referring to the small wooden station as a Union Terminal, that was just Mr. Loomis's adornful touch of artistry—the dainty final brush-stroke of a genius. In an unofficial capacity he generally spoke of this structure as "the depo."

This morning he put a special lingering cadence upon the announcement. The occasion justified a labial embroidery. Behind its regular three-coach string—express-mail-and-baggage coach, smoker, and

day coach—Number One would be hauling Mr. Tendon's private car. It wasn't every day by a long shot that such a thing happened. Mr. Loomis's tone might be interpreted as conveying the impression that the railroad most signally was honored.

There were but two flies in his ointment: no member of the Tendon party was present to admire his elocutionary performances nor, so it immediately developed, was he to have the pleasure of driving all or any of them through town in his motor-bus. He had for fares a squad of belated summer excursionists, hurrying homeward to the East before their return tickets should expire, and a brace of traveling men, calling themselves district sales managers. But about every traveling man one met these days did call himself a district sales manager.

"Nothin' but two drummers and one batch of round-trippers—just odds and ends," Mr. Loomis muttered to himself as he prepared to mount the seat of his half-filled carryall—he who ordinarily would have regarded the present company as being, if not distinguished, at least fashionable. He maintained a morose silence all the way down Hood Street and around into Railroad Avenue.

The weather being fine, Mr. Tendon and his brother magnates from Wall Street, Messrs. Shupmann and Wise, and the others of his party, had elected to stroll

to the station. These latter gentlemen went ahead under chaperonage of volunteer escorts recruited from the ranks of their late hosts. Mr. Tendon walked between Mr. Endicott and Mr. Holtzer; Mr. Endicott being sole owner and publisher of the *Courier* and moreover its entire editorial department, while Mr. Holtzer was mayor of the city and likewise president of the Mt. Hood National Bank. His bank was receiving stock subscriptions for the Reclamation Corporation; already, in fact, had received a good many. Thus early there had been quite a rush among his patrons and depositors to be entered on the books. Mr. Endicott, between polite remarks to the departing visitor, was thinking up language for the embellishment of an intended two-column article in his next issue.

Directly behind these three followed Mr. Tendon's two body-guards—you might call them that. One of them was an importation, the other a domestic product. The stranger, who answered—usually in a brief and non-committal way—to the name of Swane, had come with his employer from New York and would return with him. He was a heavily built cockney, all knobs and sharp corners, with arms which crowded his sleeves and with a dented nose and an ear thickened and scrolled into the effect of a flattened cornucopia. His conversation, of which for most

occasions he seemed to have but little, was very much on the astringent order. To his present mate, one H. J. Doheny, he made a sharp contrast.

The Doheny person was tall and thin and stoop-shouldered. He had the shape of face which frequently is described as being hawklike. He also had a drooping pale-colored mustache. He was given to milking the pendent ends of this mustache so that from pressure and much handling they rather suggested the beards of a pallid catfish. He wore the broad-brimmed hat of the ranges and stag-legged "California pants," which slightly overlapped the scrolled uppers of the high-heeled, narrow-toed boots that were on his feet. In plain view on his right flank dangled a heavy revolver in an embossed-leather holster. Mr. Doheny was the only resident of Gateway who bore customarily a weapon in sight. Even the sheriff and the chief of police snuggled their hardware under the armpit or kept it stored in the hip-pocket.

Among the citizenry Mr. Doheny was rather encouraged in his idiosyncrasies of costume and deportment as tending to provide a desirable touch of local color. Sightseers from the East expected about once in so often to encounter an old-fashioned professional Western bad man and had been known to express disappointment if they met none such. Furthermore

Mr. Doheny currently was reported, in former days and in the course of embittered barroom bickerings, as finding it necessary to kill several persons, the statistics of these reported mortalities running from as low as three to as high as seven. True, no one could supply names or dates or places touching on such homicidal estimates, and as to that supposedly gory past of his Mr. Doheny generally preserved a grim silence, although in confidential moments he had been known to drop hints and references which dropped all the harder for being weighed with lethal suggestions and which, being bruited about from mouth to mouth, gave to him an enhanced glamor of sanguinary romance. Nor did he ever in so many words exactly deny the rumor that in another time than this, a rougher and wilder and less disciplined time, he had been known as Cold Blood Doheny; and if pressed he reluctantly would admit that for quickness on the draw former connoisseurs favorably had compared his proficiency to that exhibited by the matchless Billy the Kid, now deceased. He had a fine sense of the dramatic values, this vivid hatchet-headed gentleman. He was not content merely to look a part. In so far as a man might without coming into actual conflict with these finicky latter-day laws, he lived it.

On the evening before, when word spread, Mr.

Doheny himself contributing to its circulation, that he had accepted a retaining fee to accompany Mr. Tendon on the journey as far as the junction, keeping ward over him and his property, the news served to confirm a popular belief that Mr. Tendon must carry about with him vast sums of currency. Probably he needed ready money for his immediate operations. The spot cash down and in any given amount—that was said to be the way with these big Wall Street fellows sometimes. And, saying yes or no, just like that, to a proposition involving a colossal fortune while lots of people would be haggling and hesitating to decide over a matter of pennies! Once you get used to dealing in big figures, why, big figures don't scare you any more; you play with them like marbles—as had been stated last night at Happy Ike Lorimer's owl lunch-wagon, and agreed to by all present.

So quite naturally many thrall'd eyes watched the specially engaged Mr. Doheny as he stalked stationward alongside the dour Mr. Swane, who, departing, remained what he had been throughout his sojourn, an enigmatic and an alien figure.

"Maybe," said Mr. Dart, the harness-dealer, pursuing with his glance the slabby, sinister shape of his fellow townsman, "maybe after all, Hank Doheny ain't as big a bluffer and a faker as I've always believed him to be—on the quiet. Without he'd always

buried his own dead in a secret place somewheres, I never could understand why it was nobody hadn't never seen any of the graves. But maybe all along I've had him down wrong. This Tendon naturally has to be a judge of human nature, followin' the line he does. I guess maybe he wouldn't have picked Hank if he didn't see Hank had the real shootin' stuff in him."

"You bet!" assented Mr. Dover, of the Dover Garage. "It's a mortal cinch Tendon couldn't ever got as far as they say he's gone unless he had the trick of sizing up people offhand. Did you ever see a keener eye in a man's head than he's got?"

"I never did." Mr. Dart was hearty in his concurrence. "And a spieler from away back. Mentions a million like it wasn't any more than a thin dime."

A little later, after the exchange of farewells—which ceremony had taken place at the rear platform of the private car just before Number One drew out—Mayor Holtzer and Editor Endicott were voicing in only slightly different words sentiments similar to these.

"Well, good-by, my good friends, till we meet again four weeks from now," Mr. Tendon had said, bending over the vestibule railing with final gracious handclasps for both of them. "I know what genuine

Western hospitality is at last, yes, sirs, and when I tell my people in New York what it's like they'd be anxious to come with me next trip if they could spare the time. As I've said before and now repeat, I wouldn't be leaving at all if it weren't that I've got to run back to consolidate some of the larger interests that are going into this splendid big syndicate of ours. I'd stay right on the spot with you and watch it grow at this end. Still, I'll be back soon and meanwhile I'm counting on you and your crowd to keep things humming while I'm away. Impress it on everybody that if you want money you've got to send money out after it. . . . Well, good-by again, gentlemen, till next month."

He stood there, sociably oblivious to the dust-cloud that funneled about him in the gathered speed of the retreating train, and they, having waved their hats, watched until the back end of the car diminished in distant perspective after the fashion of a folding telescope, becoming a little squared black object, then shrinking to a dot and finally vanishing away yonder where the rails merged and misted together into a dim V.

"Endicott," the mayor was saying, "there goes the smartest little man that ever I saw. You don't know what it's going to mean to me and the bank to have him for a customer. I'm not thinking so much about

handling the new company's money—that's an item, of course—but mainly I'm thinking about the help he'll be able to give me—advice and suggestions, you know. It ought to be worth a lot to any country bank, having a man like that interested in it in a friendly and—what's the word?—oh yes, friendly and altruistic way. And what a gift he's got for decision! Gives you an answer in thirty seconds on a matter that involves hundreds of thousands or even millions." Mr. Holtzer's voice throbbed with the beautiful reverence which a born money-changer has ever for a born money-maker. "And what he's going to do before he's through for this country of ours out here! It's God's country all right—look at our climate and all—but even so, it could do with a few up-to-date improvements."

"Well, he certainly has filled me up with the same spirit that he's got so much of," said the journalist. "But he's done that to everybody else, so far as I can judge, that he's come in contact with out here. Why, it's a positive inspiration just to hear him talk. Right before your very eyes you can see that sweep off there"—he waved his left arm—"see it absolutely blossoming like the rose. Just between us I'm going to tell you how much he's got me enthused: I've been talking it over with the wife and we've decided—Mrs. E. and myself—that we'll sell the old home place

that belonged to her family back in Kansas—it rents for sixty a month but what with upkeep and repairs and taxes and insurance and all, there's mighty little left from that sixty a month—that we'll sell that off and put the proceeds, every last red cent of 'em, into Tendon's promotion scheme. We want to do our share along with the rest of the town. I'd raise a couple thousand more on my plant, too, if you thought a second mortgage wouldn't be too much. Er—hum.” He hesitated, studying his chief creditor's face, but a look as of iron came over Mr. Holtzer's expression. It was as though Mr. Holtzer had shut up all his features in a burglar-proof safe. “Well, on second thought, I guess not. We'll just sell off the home place and let it go at that.”

Still half entranced by the spell which had held him for these last thirteen days, Mr. Endicott looked about him at the shabby clutter of buildings flanking the K. C. & P. S. properties and voiced an impulse peculiar to practically all interior Americans and to many of the insects, notably the red ants:

“Lordy, lordy, think how this town is going to grow! It'll be like a new era opening up. I'll gamble anything in reason that inside of five years we'll have ten thousand people where we've only got thirty-eight hundred now.”

Mr. Holtzer, who never risked anything of pe-

cuniary value on games of chance as being against sound banking principles, nodded to show that he might be willing to gamble a little reason on it. For Mr. Holtzer also had the red-ant complex—that curious, unfathomable, unconquerable desire to see the nest made crowded and uncomfortable by hiving swarms of newcomers regardless of the characters or desirability of such acquisitions. Our headiest national tippie is the U. S. census report.

“I’d say nearer fifteen thousand in five years, if I were betting,” he affirmed, almost in the tone of a man uttering a dear prayer.

Meanwhile, in the sanctity of his whizzing drawing-room, among his confidants and underlings, Mr. Tendon was relaxing somewhat his Napoleonic pomp. He was telling the negro chef that he figured it wasn’t too early in the day for a little refreshment and to shake up a light cocktail apiece for him and Messrs. Shupmann and Wise. He slid into a leathern arm-chair and stretched his short, plump legs in front of him.

“Pretty soft, pretty soft,” exulted the leader, first making sure that none save his two confederates was within earshot. “About as soft a looking snap as a man could ask for, eh what?”

“I never saw one starting off any sweeter, all the little tricks I’ve helped pull off,” said Mr. Shup-

mann. "It's going to be like picking ripe peaches from the bottom limb."

"Not so bad, gliding along across country in a private car either," stated Mr. Wise. "I'm going to get the private-car habit myself soon as I can afford it—which oughtn't to be very long, the way things are shaping."

"Renting this one was worth more than it cost, as I see it," said their chief. "It made such a swell front, such a perfect convincer. After one peek at all this hired gorgeousness it never occurred to any of these hicks to look me up or ask how about my backing or even try to find out whether any of the names of all those imaginary Wall Street millionaires that we've been pouring down their necks were real names or fancy ones. What I claim, a private car makes one grand set of credentials. No wise grifter should be without one once he gets off the main stem. Better make a note of that, Brother Shupmann."

"What I'm making a note of right now is that we've cooked up a deal that's almost, as you might say, self-operating," stated Mr. Shupmann, who during business hours at least was of a sober and pious aspect, an aspect rather suggesting a wealthy retired minister. "The seed is planted on fertile ground. We go away to give it time to sprout. And when the crop is ripe we come back for the gleanings—ah-h!"

"But the real beauty about this plant is that it's absolutely within the law," continued Mr. Tendon. "When the big blow-off comes there'll be a squawk you could hear from here to Seattle, but there won't be any pinch. Our engineers—get that, boys, our engineers!—they'll be pained to admit that they were wrong in their calculations and that after all the dam can't be built. The books—and we keep the books, remember that—show that all the money paid in has been eaten up in experimental developments and other working expenses to date. So the work stops and the company is dissolved—and there you are! The nut on this job oughtn't to be over twenty or thirty thousand and the split, according to my calculations, will run a couple of hundred thousand anyhow, maybe more than that. And not a dime's worth of risk in it for anybody—that's what I like about it. Me, I'm through with playing tag with a Federal penitentiary. From now on I'm playing the game safe. And this thing is safe—as safe as your Aunt Eliza—safer. . . . Welcome the cocktails! . . . Well, brethren, here's to boobs. May all their children be twins!"

With pleasure these three Wall Streeters drank the toast.

III

The K. C. & P. S. Road Has a Hold-Up

IT is for the psycho-analysts or whoever has charge of that particular department of scientific investigation to deduce why the least consequential among our common carriers nearly always have such mouth-filling and impressive titles. The shorter the mileage the longer the name—that appears to be the mysterious custom. Take the Klamath, Cascades & Pacific Slope Railway. From tip to tip it presented a total stretch of slightly less than one hundred miles. Of its three divisions two still were on blue-print papers and its rolling stock would have been lost on, say, the Pennsylvania system. Assuredly it would have been junked. Its ultimate fate was certain. Eventually it would be swallowed up and digested by the greater road to which it was a tributary feeder. In these times of consolidations it was phenomenal that for so long it had continued to exist under its struggling independent management. It wasn't a very profitable property; perhaps that would help to explain the reason.

One thing though: in offset for its brief length and its snuffy accommodations, it offered to scenery lovers a measure of compensation in the variety of the terrain which its tracks traversed. Coming north, as these travelers were doing, it first of all threaded a way down-grade from the outer boundaries of the range along a serpentine aisle through splendid timber which as yet had almost altogether escaped the scathing ax of the lumber contractor. Sooner or later of course this would be sacrificed to commercial needs or to even more ruinous forest fires; now the whole stretch except for a few small cuttings was intact and unmarred. A mile or so above and beyond Gateway the tract began—thousands upon thousands of acres of Douglas fir and prime Oregon pine; trunks like cathedral pillars and evergreen canopies woven into a lofty temple roof, which shut the sunlight out and made a scented everlasting twilight upon the weedless, needle-covered earth below. Here and there buttes, clothed thickly in lodge-pole pines, humped their spiny backs like angry tom-cats, but for the most part the land lay almost smooth.

At that high altitude—almost a mile above sea-level, although from the flatness of the plateau you never would have guessed it—the air had literally a taste to it—the taste of a winesap apple close to the core where the juice is sweeter and spicier. There

were, strangely enough, no chains of foot-hills, no off-cast spurs of the main range. Off to the left, when the woods occasionally shredded to thinness, the passer-by in a swift-changing glimpse could pick up the panorama-like spread and sweep of an army of tall peaks. Despite intervening distance their far-away outlines would not be blurred and indistinct but sharp and clean-cut, some of them bitten off short—they would be volcanoes extinct these millions of years—some wearing conical pointed white clown-caps of snow, which never entirely melted away even in midsummer.

Then, a second later, the trees would close in and dress ranks again and the vista of marching mountains would be gone until next time.

To the right, with almost the abruptness of a painted back-drop meeting the floor of a stage, the forest met the dry prairie, the high desert. It was a hostile desert, a dusty one, all spined and scaled and rheumy. It was scabbed with streaks and splotches of leprous-looking alkali. It was clothed with dull, seemingly lifeless sage-brush that resembled nothing so much as tufts of dried bristles clinging fast to a blistered, naked hide. Indeed, the entire suggestion of this scalded desolation brought to the mind a broadened but kindred simile. It was as though a dead world had been peeled and then the raw skin

had been pegged down tight and fast above the corpse, there forevermore to crack and warp and shrivel. Springtime, when the timid little desert flowers crept in carpets over the barren slopes and the sage put out its pale small leaves and its paler small blooms, the desert had a beauty of its own and, for some, a lure. Now, though, it was all an unspeakable, scopeless dreariness as forbidding to the sense of sight as the pure keen wind which blew across it was agreeable to the nose and throat.

Where the descending road-bed swung free of the timber-line and sloped away across the borders of the desert toward the naturally watered, well-cultivated agricultural and grazing belt encircling Pekawa Junction seventy miles beyond, there was a cañon to be negotiated. It was not a very deep or a very long cañon as cañons go in the West but it was worth seeing. On the map it was set down as Pipestone Cañon. It was steep-sided and from its top to its bottom twelve hundred feet below, where Pipestone Creek tumbled over a rocky bed, it was a defile of splotched raw colors. Umbers and ochers; pinks and grays and deep greens and brilliant purples; red quartz boulders and winking scraps of mica; slides of glossy, glassy obsidian, and black holes like the entrances to tiny caves; barrings of such-and-such and thin crumbly strata of this-or-that—the whole thing made you think that

here into this freakish geological gash the Devil had scraped his palet and dumped his paint-pots.

The tracks entered at the lower end by a spidery trestle thrown across a breath-taking void; thence they coursed along a narrow shelf some ninety feet below the top of the cleft until they emerged into the broken seas of the sage six miles farther on. Number One, steaming at reduced speed and twisting along like an overgrown, smoke-puffing measuring-worm against the sheer eastern wall, was about midway of the chasm's length. Three hundred yards ahead of her a water-tank set on stilts clung at the edge of the verge, overshadowing a pump-house and a tool-house. You might have thought this a most unlikely site for a tank and a pump, but there were reasons. Water for the replenishing of the locomotive boilers was drawn up by pipes; after the trains quit the woodlands there was no water to be had excepting at this point until they neared the junction at the northern terminal, and if repairs were needed en route the theory was that the tinkering might be done while the thirsty engine took its drink. There was no resident helper regularly on duty in this empty spot. Once in so often a hand-car crew came from a section gang's headquarters to start the siphons and fill the reservoir.

For the curving and slightly slanted approach here the engineer was throttling down to slacken his gait

yet more, when something he saw made him throw his brake and give her the grit from the sand-box. What he saw was a fire blazing briskly directly between the rails almost opposite the tank. He had meant to exercise the option of stopping anyhow; now he would have to stop.

"Look yonder," he bade his fireman over his shoulder. "Hot cinders from the up-freight this morning must have set fire to one of them rotten, greasy old cross-ties. Well, it's lucky it happened where there's water handy, and lucky we should come along before she got too good a start on us."

Little sparks flew and blinked out like perishing lightning-bugs as the chocked wheels clutched on the steel. With not much more than the customary jolt, Number One came to a standstill. The fireman dropped down on the shaly underfooting, the engineer just behind him, and then both of them involuntarily bumped together and backed against the lowermost steps of the cab and, by the same token, involuntarily raised their hands above their heads.

A third person was present. This one apparently had materialized from behind one of the squared supports of the tank. At any rate he had come upon them without warning, a poised, menacing figure, booted, masked—and armed. He waggled the muzzle of a long-barreled revolver in their astonished faces

and, shrinking away from it, they gazed with goggling eyes down its gullet and instantly were hypnotized.

It was testimony to the magnifying effect which surprise and quick peril may create in the human brain that the fireman stoutly should have insisted—after the danger was over and when stock was being taken among the eye-witnesses of their emotions and impressions—that the lone bandit was fully six feet, four inches in height. But Mr. Tendon's colored servant, giving excited evidence, was sure the stranger was nearer seven feet tall and broad in proportion and had eyes that burned in his head like two big live coals and a voice that made the flesh crawl. It was exaggeration but it was sincere exaggeration.

As a matter of fact it subsequently became established that the hold-up man was not greatly above the average height and was of a slender, sinewy build, and that for one of his calling he had rather pleasant brown eyes—eyes with smoldering embers of passion in them but not given to blazing unless temper took their owner. Also his customary speaking voice was drawling and soft. The published descriptions of him that were to be circulated in connection with the notice of reward offered for his apprehension would emphasize that detail.

Almost casually, with no sign of heat, he addressed the confounded engine-man and his fireman.

"Don't be scared, you two," were his first words to them, issuing through the silk handkerchief which covered his face from the bridge of the nose down. "You're not going to get damaged unless you make some false move. And you can haul your hands down—you'll be more comfortable with them down. There—that's better.

"Now then, come along out of that and step on ahead of me over here," he commanded next.

Docile as sheep they obeyed him, single-filing before their alert shepherd to where the tool-house yawned hospitably. Ordinarily the door was locked, but this in its essentials was an honest country and one singularly free from tramps, and the key hung in plain view on a nail beside the door—there was no telling when or for what small emergency the stored contents might be needed. Now, though, it was plain that beforehand preparations had been made for their reception. The lock dangled in its hasp and the key was in it.

"Walk inside," the masked one bade his captives. They did so, both still mute and unresisting, and scrouged against the farther wall, stumbling over picks and shovels and tamping-irons.

"Don't try to break out," he advised them. "Because if you do try and I'm still around here you might regret it. Stay right here until somebody lets

you out. Somebody will, I reckon, after I'm gone. You'll be a little bit crowded but it's the best I can do for you." Almost he seemed to banter with them. Certainly there was a hint of good-natured irony in his tone.

With that he slammed the door, leaving them huddled in darkness and close quarters, and through the thick boarding they could hear the clunk and rattle of metal as he made their prison fast upon them.

This much done and easily done, the hold-up man turned and ran nimbly back lengthwise of the halted train, keeping close alongside the cars and thereby making himself invisible to any coach passengers unless they actually should poke their heads out as he passed so speedily. None did. In fact, he had accomplished his objects and had departed before the occupants of the smoker and the day coach were aware of trouble. Such of them as gave a thought to the somewhat prolonged halt here in Pipestone Cañon perhaps were moved mildly to wonder why it should be taking so long to water the engine.

Other than the pair penned in there in the tool shanty, only two more—and they likewise members of the train-crew—divided for the moment the proof of the startling fact.

The express messenger, who also was the baggage man, chanced to look idly from his half-opened side

door and beheld with a grunt of shock and alarm the swift approach of that ominous shape. But presence of mind did not desert him. Pushing the sliding door to, he bolted it and barricading himself behind a stack of drummers' sample-cases in a far corner of his domain, he waited with a sawed-off shotgun in his humid grip for the expected assault upon his stronghold.

No attack came, which at first was wearing upon his taut nerves, but later, as he told himself and a good many others, he began to feel actually disappointed. He was all set—so he said—to blow that robber's head plumb off his shoulders the moment it showed inside his baggage car. He openly regretted the improbability that another such good chance ever would come his way. As time passed on he loomed before his family and acquaintances in really an heroic light.

The fourth and last original sharer of the secret was the flagman, by name Eddie Bantry. In pursuance of his regular duties when a stop was made for any reason, Mr. Bantry dropped nimbly down from the forward platform of the day coach and then froze stiff with his mouth widely ajar and his hands creeping upward past his ears. It was as though this meeting had been accomplished by plan and appointment. For he had descended almost on top of

the scudding form of the solitary operator. The latter checked and straightened, and now Mr. Bantry was getting his orders, too, they being emphasized with a menacing gesture of the hand which held the blue-nosed revolver.

"Light right out down the track, brother." So the bandit gaily bade Eddie Bantry. "Hit it up now and keep on hitting it up. Let's see just how fast a fat man can run."

"Which I certainly showed him," confessed the shameless Mr. Bantry subsequently. "Yes, sir, if that baby craved to see some runnin' I shore did gratify him. Startin' off, I was kinder worried because I seemed to be sort of handicapped and hampered some way. But after I'd gone maybe the first quarter of a mile I found out what was the matter with me—I had both arms still stuck right straight up above my head as far as I could stretch 'em. So I took 'em down and after that was when I quit triffin' and really done what you might call the fancy travelin'. I'm still pantin', though. Wisht I could afford to lay off a couple of weeks and ketch up with my pantin'. I'm 'way behind."

With Mr. Bantry's humped form lessening in the distance, the adventurer glanced keenly up and down the snaky right of way—all clear.

So he bent to a half-crouch and sped the length

of the last car, which as you'll remember was Mr. Herbert Tendon's private car, and vaulted nimbly over the brass guard-rail of the observation platform at the rear and, with none of his late jesting air about him, with a deadly seriousness manifest in all his tensed movements, he stepped into the lounge just as the affiliated Messrs. Tendon, Shupmann and Wise were reaching for their third set of pre-luncheon cocktails.

IV

Mr. Tendon Suffers a Loss

FOR his hours of relaxation, as for certain of his public appearances, Mr. Tendon had his democratic tendencies. Being for a number of reasons in a mood for unbending, he saw fit to invite his secretary and his brace of body-guards, Swane, the Londoner, and Doheny, the native bravo, to join him and his two business affiliates in round number three of their series of forenoon cocktails. Mr. Tendon's valet was summoned from one of the staterooms, where he had been engaged on his master's wardrobe, to aid in preparing and serving the drinks. Thus it befell, haply or otherwise—dependent upon whether your sympathies were with our audacious marauder or his victims—that the aggregate personnel happened to be collected in one spot, to wit the lounge in the back end of the private car, at the instant of that formidable visitor's advent.

Probably it was the cook who first became aware that an unbidden somebody, moreover somebody of a most forbidding aspect, had burst in among them.

At any rate it was he who gave a general warning to the rest. He accomplished this by dropping a silver waiter loaded with small glasses upon the floor and simultaneously uttering a hybridized exclamation, which partly was a strangled whoop and partly a tremendous gasp. With inner forebodings this scared black man had undertaken his first trip into the barbaric domains west of the Mississippi. And, Heaven helping him, the first time would be the last! He made that resolution as he was making his smothered outcry.

In the same fraction of a second, alarm beset all the occupants of the place. With different individuals it manifested itself in different ways. For instance, Mr. Wise, who was a portly man with pouches like dewlaps under his jowls, looked where the negro's popped eyes were glaring, and beholding in the doorway an apparition which to him seemed the veritable embodiment of armed lawlessness, he collapsed out of his chair and billowed and heaved face downward upon the carpet, deeply inhaling its gritty odors and rubbing his lower chins into its nap. In Mr. Shupmann's case the undigested alcohol he had swallowed turned cold and sour on his stomach and for the time being he was a helpless paralytic.

Mr. Tendon, who was seated between these two, shrank within himself and choked and became af-

flicted with a quick palsy as he realized that the intruder's eyes, which vigilantly darted this way and that from the slitted breadth beneath the brim of a tilted sombrero and the top of a handkerchief mask, to rest upon first one and then another of the astonished company, each time returned to stare upon him with a baleful purposeful intent. Through his mounting spasms of terror Mr. Tendon realized that he was destined to figure as the chief object of this single-handed invasion.

The cowed valet had slid behind the insufficient buckler of the secretary's sparse frame and one of his trembling hands clutched convulsively at his watch-pocket. But the secretary, being as sorely frightened as any there, dumbly resisted this effort on the part of the valet to use him for a shield and scrouged into a handy corner where, through all which followed, he squatted in a sort of dumb petrification. As for Mr. Doheny, he at first seemed too greatly astounded for any defensive action whatsoever. He, who was reputed to be so lightning-fast at the draw, strangely refrained then from any attempt at drawing.

Alone out of all the trapped seven of them, the cockney showed faint signs of resistance. His practiced hands curled into fists and inside his sleeves his biceps knotted as his arms came slowly up, but he relaxed into an irate submission and growled hoarse

abortive swear words as the intruder's revolver was lifted from its owner's side and centered upon him. He did not fall back a single pace, though; at least not then. This foreigner held his ground. His bottled-in rage sent the blood up into his face until his cauliflower ear burned as a crimson rosette.

Mr. Doheny was prompted to take advantage of the brief diversion created by the Englishman's thwarted rebellion. His half-poised right hand stole down toward his own weapon where it hung at his hip. Before his crooking fingers could close on the gun, the outlaw, in movements almost too fast for the eye to follow, swung his revolver about and gripping its handle in both hands so that the weapon projected with a seeming awkwardness straight out at arm's length in front of him, he fired once.

Mr. Doheny gave vent to a most unbadmanlike remark. He said, "Ouch!" He said it in a loud pained tone of voice and clapped his empty palm to his flank and dropped to his knees. His enhanced distress would appear to be justified. With amazing quickness, without taking aim—or so the dazed spectators would have sworn—the man in the doorway had shot away Mr. Doheny's holstered pistol without doing any physical injury to Mr. Doheny himself. Only the flesh tingled where the bullet had grazed the trouser leg. The detached scabbard, carrying

with it a severed section of Mr. Doheny's cartridge-belt, lay there upon the floor now within grasping distance of his hand. But he made no effort to retrieve it—not Mr. Doheny. He had had his lesson. It was a most illuminating lesson. He slumped into a patient and immobile model for a statue to be called "*Tamed.*"

To tell all this has taken a much longer time than the actual time of its occurrence. Possibly not more than twenty seconds had elapsed between the clatter and crash of that burdened cocktail tray and this stupefying display of marksmanship. Now then, the invader spoke: "Everybody stand still right where he is!" He gave the command in a steady low-pitched voice. He advanced into the body of the car, passing the crouching Doheny and by gestures giving the obstinate ex-prizefighter Swane his orders to edge over to the cross-wall beyond, Swane reluctantly obeying. He turned his back upon the valet, the darky and the secretary, who all three had gravitated together into the space originally preempted by the secretary, and then, with Swane helplessly penned against the partition at his left, and his eyes, so it seemed, everywhere at once, the stranger again addressed them collectively, pointing his sentences with vigilant little shifts of his revolver.

"If nobody moves an inch nobody is going to get

hurt. If anybody does move that's his own lookout, because I'll certainly drill holes in him. And don't be worrying about your watches or your pocketbooks. I'm not after what's in your pockets. What I'm after is—you!"

The punctuating gun muzzle dropped on Mr. Tendon. And at that Mr. Tendon's panic measurably increased. Writhing feebly and smitten with terrific tremors all over him, the poor man vainly strove to wriggle out of that dreadful focus.

"Don't shoot!" he begged, in a thin, broken quaver—the ghost of a voice. "For God's sake don't shoot! Just tell me what you want me to do. I'll do it!"

"That's reasonable," stated the bandit, "reasonable and accommodating. You take the words right out of my mouth. Get up from there!" His tone was curt, merciless.

The famous promoter rose, quaking pitifully. He teetered on his feet, threatening to fall. His legs were like yielding columns of soft rubber beneath him. Their calves seemed to have an independent quiver that was all their own. His trouser legs pulsed to their twitching.

"I'm up," he said, as though to make positive his great willingness to oblige.

"Then stay up!"

"I will." He strove frantically to regain mastery of his treacherous limbs.

"There's a safe set in the wall of this car, right alongside that door yonder—the door where I just came in. Isn't there?"

"No—no—yes, I mean yes."

"Certainly you mean yes. And I mean business. Go over there and stoop down in front of it and open it up. Hurry now!"

"I—I can't." Mr. Tendon's desperation increased as he comprehended what was being demanded of him. He cast ahead for excuse, for time. Rescue might come, salvation might providentially be vouchsafed even yet.

"You can't?" The robber's voice took on an increased enmity. "Why can't you?"

"It's locked."

"Unlock it."

"I don't know the combination—I've—I've forgotten it," babbled Mr. Tendon.

"Either remember that combination or remember your prayers. I give you just ten seconds to do one or the other."

"I remember—I'll open it." Mr. Tendon's capitulation was complete and unconditional. He tottered across the intervening space and fell down rather than bent down. His shaking fingers pawed and fumbled

at the small silver knobs of a small concealed safe, set flush with the metal work of the wainscoting, until the wards clicked.

As the thick little steel door swung open, the bandit fairly jumped to Mr. Tendon's side. One hand scooped out all its contents—first a sheaf of thick, sealed manila envelops, next a little strapped leather portfolio, finally from a drawer between the emptied compartments one more long stout envelop, which bulged with what was in it. If the ravager of the strong box was disappointed in finding no visible currency, at least he did not voice his chagrin. Nor did he tarry to ascertain whether any of the parcels and packets held money.

Still with his left hand—in his right was his pistol—he tugged at a broad leather belt and freed a meal-sack which all this while had been hanging, apron-like, from his middle. He shook it out flat and into its mouth he pitched his accumulated yieldings. Then, ignoring Mr. Tendon, who remained in a palpitant squat at his feet, he spoke to the others:

“If one of you shows his nose or makes a sound until I'm clear out of sight and hearing I'll turn back and plug him—understand? In five minutes though some of you can go forward and let the engineer out of a tool-shed that's just beyond where this train is standing. He's locked in there along with his fireman.

And while you're at it you might put out a fire you'll find burning between the track about fifty feet in front of the locomotive.

"Let's see, was there anything else?" He seemed to consider. "Oh yes, there's one more thing." He tucked the wadded upper end of the sack beneath his girthing, stepped forward two paces and deftly caught up that mistreated weapon which had been for so long Mr. Doheny's most prized possession and adornment. "That'll be about all, I reckon," he added, and in apparent sheer light-heartedness over the success of his exploit this slim highwayman laughed—to himself and then at them as his cool derisive eyes swept them, all of them in more or less undignified postures, all of them rigid and still as so many waxworks except for those uncontrollable tendencies to shiver which already have had their share of description. He made a low bow—mockery and gallantry both were in it—but the parting look he sped toward Mr. Tendon was freighted only with a bitter derisive contempt. "Good-by, gentlemen, and a pleasant journey to you—from now on!"

He backed for the door. At the threshold the only mishap to him in all his daring venture befell. His loosened mask slipped down, and for one instant, before he could catch the cloth and jerk it back into place, at least two of Mr. Tendon's entourage caught

a flash of a youthful tanned face set in a reckless grin—and knew they would be able to remember that face afterwards. Without touching it in flight, he leaped over the railing and was gone from their view.

V

He Next Offers a Reward

BEHIND him in the rifled coach the departing one left seven who temporarily were held in thrall under his threats of summary reprisal did they stir until the time-limit set by him had expired. It was the man from overseas who first defied that stern parting injunction. He didn't wait the full five minutes out. He scarcely waited half a minute.

He darted to the doorway and sheltering his bulk inside the lintels he carefully peeped out while Mr. Tendon, still on all fours before his yawning and gutted strong box, entreated with him not to endanger all their lives by such criminal disobedience.

"Don't do that, Swane," pleaded Mr. Tendon. "For God's sake don't let him see you! Do you want to get us killed?"

Mr. Swane appeared not to hear his unhappy employer. Certainly he gave no heed. He craned his neck farther. So soon the despoiler had sped down the tracks a hundred yards or more and nimbly was scaling the steep cañon wall, finding hand-grips and

toe-holds which the other, at his greater distance, could not see. It was like watching a fly traveling up a window-pane.

"Climbs like a blinkin' billy-goat," declared Mr. Swane. "Right stryde up—sportin', wot I calls it—tykin' charnces like that. 'E's got a sense of humor, too, that balmy beggar 'as." It was plain that Mr. Swane bore no great grudge on account of his late embarrassments. There was a tinge of unwilling admiration in these comments of his. He continued to peer until the fleeing man had heaved himself above over the gable-like rim, to loom for one flash against the blue sky and then to disappear.

"Well, 'e's gone," over his shoulder he told his companions; "and I, for one, ain't expectin' of 'im back."

With that, Mr. Doheny, so recently his partner in humiliation, emerged from his tranced state. He became galvanized with a furious vengeful energy. Boldly he joined Mr. Swane between the door-jambs.

"Where? Which way did he go?" he demanded.

"Over the roof, that's where," said Mr. Swane airily. "And then, I dare sye, over the 'ills and far awye. W'y were you arskin'—if I might myke so bold as to inquire?" he added, elaborating the sarcasm.

"If only the tricky scoundrel hadn't got the drop

on me!" deplored Mr. Doheny, now quite the determined berserk. Mr. Doheny was busied in the operation known among the Chinese as saving the face. "If only he hadn't took that sudden advantage on me and blowed my gun loose just as I was fixin' to pull down on him! If only I was heeled I'd follow him—on foot, just as I am, if I had to!"

"But tykin' due care not to overtyke 'im, eh wot, bully?" countered Mr. Swane.

The purport of this rejoinder soaked in through Mr. Doheny's righteous choler. He turned on the scornful alien.

"Say you!" he roared, expanding his shape to make it more formidable. "Are you tryin' to git gay with me? With ME!"

The laconic Swane had his own retort ready, but before he could frame it in words Mr. Tendon had unmesmerized himself and had scrambled to his feet to interrupt the dialogue. If but a little before he had been supine in his bewilderment, now he was frenzied in his choler.

"Don't stand there wasting time talking!" he shouted. "If you're sure he's gone, get busy. Do something! Get this train started! Notify the police—notify the sheriff of the county! Get a posse out! Rouse the whole country! Don't you realize that I've been robbed?" He pointed a shaking finger toward

the stripped interior of the safe. "Don't you realize that I'm the only real sufferer here? Do you want to see me ruined while you stick around like a bunch of dummies?" He threw himself toward the nearest window and glared out into the clean, hard sunlight. "Where's the nearest telephone—the nearest telegraph station?"

"That's the trouble," stated Mr. Doheny, his voice ascending above a babble of confused and impotent suggestions, which by now was rising from practically all sides as Mr. Tendon's two fear-stricken confrères and the lesser functionaries discovered that they, too, had regained the precious boon of coherent utterance and proceeded to put it to use. "There ain't no long-distance line—no, nor no other kind neither, till just before you get to the Junction—Mullin's ranch, that'd be the nearest one and that's fully forty miles north."

"Damn such an uncivilized country!" exploded the pestered Mr. Tendon. "Then somebody run tell the conductor to back out of this precipice." In his present plight the Little Giant was thoughtless of his choice of words. In calmer moments he would have known as well as anyone the distinction between a precipice and a gulch. "Tell him I say to start this train and back out of here and run back to Gateway. We'll start in hunting that desperado from there."

"I doubt if he'd do that," explained Mr. Doheny, speaking from his store of experience with regard to local conditions. "It's his job to shove her on through."

Mr. Tendon refused to hearken. He made a motion as of tossing all routine, all trivial formalities aside. It was as though he took the passenger schedule of the K. C. & P. S. in his two hands and tore it to fragments and flung the fragments afar. He spun on his heels to choose him a messenger.

"You go, Wise," he bade that gentleman.

"No sir," said Mr. Wise, wanly but firmly, and raising his head from the floor. "I can talk again but I can't walk yet. Besides, suppose there was more than one of them? Suppose he's got some of his gang outside waiting to nail me?" Mr. Wise had a curious deflated look about him. You would have taken oath that he was losing flesh right before your very eyes.

"You'll have to excuse me, please," added Mr. Shupmann in the posture of a humble suppliant. "You'll absolutely have to excuse me from going. I'm too weak. I feel like I'm going to have a heart attack. I couldn't stand any more shocks." He also was of a punctured and flabby aspect.

Mr. Tendon sought further. But his secretary had whisked into the nearest stateroom, finding it already tenanted by the chef, who had withdrawn beneath the

bed but betrayed his hysterical presence by the chattering of his teeth; and the secretary, entering, had the wit to do what the chef had not done—he bolted the door behind him. The secretary was prepared to resign before quitting this security.

So Mr. Tendon dragooned the hapless valet for service. He might have sent the cockney, especially since that individual manifested no reluctance at accepting the assignment. In fact he volunteered for it. But Mr. Tendon seemed to desire the immediate company of some valorous person. By harsh, intimidating speech he browbeat the pale valet to take on the rôle of emissary. The latter went, but not with any stimulated gait. Cautiously he crept forward—almost he crawled forward, slinking well in under the overhang of the coaches, and when a loose boulder stirred beneath his feet he jumped and bumped his head violently. This, he told himself, was nearly as bad as the hideous experience through which he had just passed.

So much accomplished, Mr. Tendon, having wildly cursed the enforced delay, swung accusingly on Mr. Doheny.

“I hire you to make a front—I mean—” Swiftly he corrected himself. “What I mean to say, I hire you to protect me and my valuables, and when trouble comes you quit cold.”

"If he hadn't took me by surprise things'd 'a' been different," protested Mr. Doheny.

"'E 'ad cold feet to start with." This in a gentle murmur was a contribution from Mr. Swane to the current symposium of views.

"Shut up!" snapped the irritated Mr. Tendon. "I'm doing the talking here." It was evident Mr. Tendon, despite a manifest deep concern for the loss of his possessions, was endeavoring to conjure back his customary poise—was trying to remember now what a captain of finance and a leader of men owed himself and his position in the world. He might fume and seethe—was in fact at this moment doing both those things—but from now on he meant that his grasp on issues should be consolidated and efficient. Such was his intention, but will-power is one thing and complete regain of a set of overtaxed nerves is quite another. Suddenly, in the midst of his efforts, something within him snapped under pressure.

"Damn your explanations!" he yelled in a strained high treble. "I'm ruined unless I get back what that robber just took away with him! You might as well all understand that. I've got to get back that stuff before he's had a chance to wreck me!"

"Was there so much money in your safe as all that?" asked Mr. Doheny in an awed voice.

"Money—who's talking about money? Of course

there wasn't any—of course there was money in that safe." The distracted little speculator was seemingly on the verge of turning incoherent. He gulped, becoming specifically more articulate: "Where else would a man keep his money when he's traveling except in a safe?—if he's got any safe to put it in."

"About how much, offhand, would you say was there?" pressed Mr. Doheny.

"Twenty—thirty—about thirty thousand dollars—in bills. I'll cut it up with whoever brings back all the loot that fellow took—I mean brings it back intact. I'll give five thousand and if I get it back inside of a week I'll double the amount—ten thousand cash and no questions asked."

"Fine and dandy," exulted Mr. Doheny. "I aim to be in on that there reward my own self. You see, gents, it's like this—I happen to know the party you're after and that's something that nobody else but me does know—till I tell you."

"You know him—by name?" Mr. Tendon almost shrieked it.

"Sure—by sight and by name and by the place where he lives and by reputation and every other way there is."

"Why didn't you tell us that before?"

"What chance did I git with everybody else rantin' 'round and screechin'? I've been tryin' to tell you

this last five minutes but nobody wouldn't listen. I spotted him dead to rights when that there handkerchief slipped down, but I'd 'a' known who he was anyway—just by the way he fetched his gun up. You seen it, I guess? That's when he first gave himself away so fur as I was concerned. His whole family gang is like that when it comes to handlin' a six-gun. They don't throw her down on you, cow-man fashion; they bring her up like this"—illustrating—"with both hands instid of one and—"

"To hell with all that!" Mr. Tendon broke in. "What's his name?"

"I'm comin' to that now. His name is Boone Ransom. Young feller from back East down South somewheres. Used to be a forest-ranger before he got throwed out a few months back. Served in the war, too. So far as I knows of, this is his first crooked job. What's more, I can figger out where he'll likely make fur."

"You can? Good!"

"Well, not so good as you might think fur. The way I dope it, he had a car waitin' up yonder at the top of the bluff where he swarmed up out of this hole in the ground—he probably wouldn't depend on a cayuse—and by now I judge he's hellin' off across them dry flats fur the Mallard's Nest—that's where his folks live—fifty-eight miles off sort of southeast

from here; kind of a cove right up clos't under the mountains."

"Will he stop there?"

"Bound to—just naturally bound to. He'd 'a' probably laid up there anyhow, even ef he wasn't under suspicion. But now, havin' showed me his face—"

"I saw it too," put in Mr. Wise. "If I'm not mistaken he's the same mug that got on this car only yesterday pretending to be sight-seeing. I was sitting here writing some letters when that gabby nigger of ours took him through, and there was something about him made me notice him. No doubt that was when he spotted the safe. I remember how he kept on asking the smoke questions. Oh, I can identify him again all right once they land him."

"That's liable to be the tough part—landin' him," expounded Mr. Doheny. "Pretty near all that bunch of God-fursook, poverty-struck dry-farmers out there on the edge of that desert are his kinsfolks. They stick together, that crowd—talk the same way, think the same way, shoot the same way, most of 'em. They'll help hide him no matter what he's done, and protect him every way they can, I bet you on that. And that's a mighty rough strip of mountains that juts out right up behind the cove. It won't be no easy job, smokin' him out won't."

"I'll advertise him in every paper in the whole state," declared Mr. Tendon, once more displaying the executive mind. "I'll post up the reward notices all over everywhere. If only this infernal train would get going we ought to have him surrounded before night, no matter what the stretch down in that cove place is like. And then I'll send enough people through it to comb it out, sooner or later. Dead or alive, I'll get him. And the sooner the better."

"By all means," conceded Mr. Shupmann; "but see here a minute, old man." He plucked at Mr. Tendon's sleeve and drawing the smaller man apart from the rest counseled him in a hollow and uneasy undertone: "Getting this Ransom guy, or rather getting what he carried off, is the most important thing right now—I grant you that. But I'm dubious about all this hullabaloo you're planning. The less notoriety we get out of this jam the better it'll suit me—suit all of us. You get me, don't you?"

"That's right, too," lamented Mr. Tendon. "Still, what else can we do? This mess gets rottener every minute." Beyond earshot of the others they whispered together earnestly while the furrows of worry deepened in their foreheads. "You and Wise better duck on out from here, dodging newspaper people as much as you can, and I'll stick around and raise the hue and cry for this man-hunt," Mr. Tendon was

advising when Mr. Doheny chose to resume his broken-off controversy with Mr. Swane.

"Say, looky here, young feller," he said with a sudden harsh vehemence, "it's just occurred to me that you've been stickin' your lip into my private affairs pretty tolerable free and easy these last few minutes. I ain't in the habit of lettin' people git fresh with me—git me?"

Through a lowering and truculent cast Mr. Doheny sneered. He did it very well. He had features admirably adapted for sneering. But the retired pugilist declined to be intimidated.

"On the contrary, I sh'd sye, from wot's 'appened a bit ago that you was used to that sort of thing," he rejoined cheerily. "Arsk me, you done it like a ruddy professional."

"Look here, you!" Mr. Doheny laid a rude detaining hand on his critic's coat lapel. "I'm goin' on fifty years old and all my life before I ain't never allowed nobody to hand me any more slack jaw than what you've already done."

"Your idge wouldn't interest me," said Mr. Swane, strangely calm under this threatening, "but I can give a guess wot dye you was born on. Synt Swithin's Day, that's wot—'cos you're all wet!"

Unaware as he was of the superstitions of Old England, Mr. Doheny nevertheless sensed that some-

where here an insult lurked. He shook a menacing fist under Mr. Swane's flattened nose—and a moment later was deeply regretting this overt maneuver.

For now, and for the second time within that one crowded quarter-hour, Gateway's most glamorous figure suffered a profound discomfiture. The imperturbable Briton hauled off and hit him convincingly in the center of the face which Mr. Doheny had been trying so hard to save.

As the small of the stunned champion's back met the car floor, the car began to move jerkily forward.

VI

The Mallard's Nest

THERE was an area where Nature displayed a somewhat compact collection of her local idiosyncrasies. It was as though she said to you: "It's no trouble to show goods. Come hither and look at all these assembled curious samples of my handiwork in these remote parts. In this corner you'll find practically the whole fantastic assortment mixed in together. If you don't see the specimen you want, ask for it—probably it's here somewhere."

Approximately the center of this conglomerated freakishness was the hedged-in basin called the Mallard's Nest. The Mallard's Nest was compassed by natural oddities. It was an oddity itself. Tucked away on the inner edge of an otherwise sterile mesa, it had a water supply, a limited and not always dependable one, but still a supply. That in itself, lacking the adjacent presence of many weird conformations, would have made this nooked place notable throughout a seemingly limitless expanse of high arid table-land. Behind it from west and southwest

the mountains shouldered forward to thrust a rude elbow into the ribs of the desert.

The imminent tip of this elbow was a certain steep and very lofty promontory slightly isolated from the rest although united to them on one of its inner angles by a long, swinging scimiter-shaped ridge so sharply elevated and so razor-like in its contours as to be absolutely insurmountable. Viewed from below in front, the mountain itself seemed to stand alone. It was only when you toiled to its top, away up above timber-line where the rim-rock encircled the knobby splintered tip like a diadem for a caveman's heathen goddess, that you saw how it was joined to its fellows. Few humans ever had done this, though; the task was too forbidding; the reward, except for a confirmed lover of wilderness, too meager. This spindle was called Shivery Peak.

The Mallard's Nest rested in a pinched-in gore just at its foot. Due south from the cove, completely shutting it in on that flank, there reared up an unscalable parapet of barren outcrop, which nobody ever had ascended although a few had tried. It made you think of a mighty stone scarp thrown up by ancient cosmic forces for the enclosing of nothingness. Its base, though, might be penetrated through a succession of subterranean galleries and borings separated by angling cross-walls but con-

nected by twisted tortuous passageways which pierced each barrier. At the farther lower end of these chill black corridors the explorer who dared to worm his way thus far would find one of those roofed-over caverns known as ice caves, because here the melted snows seeping down through crannies and along invisible seams from the crests had congealed in a temperature which, winter or summer, remained forever the same. He might find it, but he would not tarry long, what with ice overhead and about him, a glare of distorted ice underfoot, and his blood fit to freeze in his veins.

Facing this wall across the intervening cleft there sprawled a lava bed that was like a vast, gnarled gray-black hand which clutched in its grasp the blasted soil beneath. The lava bed was a monstrous dead miser clinging eternally to what had been worthless to begin with. It testified, as did the craters higher up, to the throes which racked the molten planet when her pelt was stiffening and cooling in the final epilepsy of the Age of Volcanoes. The craters mostly have changed. Some, having leaks in their bottoms to let out the rain water and the snow water, are dry and empty—the abandoned fireplaces of the olden fire-gods. The rest are lovely circular lakes like dimples in the haunches of the mountains, and they are thick with fish excepting where boiling sul-

phur springs with their yellow stainings make the shallows lifeless.

The lava bed, though, is as it was at the time of its outpouring. Its countless ridges are like upthrust knife-blades of glass to cut the feet; its millions of ravines and crevasses and pot-holes are almost bare of vegetation. Its honeycombed skirts shelter a few conies, a few coyotes, a few of those indomitable, fierce little grizzlies which people out there call sand-lappers, because to them it seems inconceivable how the midget creatures exist unless they exist by eating grit.

Farther in, the twisted, distorted, pocked, pitted waste is devoid of all living things. It spraddles there giving back to the skies a brazen, evil shimmer—glare for glare, heat-wave for heat-wave, glint of mica for glint of sunbeam. A crow flying across it would need to carry his own rations. No sane crow would try.

The plowman, having preempted all the prairies, might come here and fight a war of odds against the desert for a livelihood—already was doing so in fact. Then, sooner or later, he would contend with the still untouched slopes of the mountains. But for so long as this planet might endure, the lava bed would be indifferent to mankind's puny stormings—the last safe citadel and fastness of the wild, the crouching silent sphinx of the Cascades.

Between the curving-in rock rampart and the paralleling fortress of the lava, the distance through the snuggest part of the gulch was not above a quarter of a mile measuring by straight opposites. It was a bottle-mouth. The cove was the bottle and through its slim neck poured a slender stream of tough willow scrub and stunted green stuff, which straggled and thinned and died a mile or so away beyond the terminal outposts of the stony rampart. From there on, the broadened unreckonable desert flowed eastward, hemmed on one side for a long way by the lava. Finally the last twisted fingers of the lava tailed off and thereafter the desert ruled.

Occasionally a thin elongated grove of gnarled and haggard junipers would mark the course of a low swale. Frequently a patch of alkali, crusted and pale like an old sore healing, would show itself in the dip of a coulée; or there might be a shallow sunken erosion of alkaline deposits resembling nothing so much as a white-rimmed eye-socket in a crumbly gray skull. For the rest, there was revealed to the casual observer only solitude and sage-brush and jack-rabbits—sage-brush by the mile, jack-rabbits by the thousands. To count the clumps of sage against a slope would be like trying to count the blades of grass in a meadow; and for every ten clumps there appeared to be at least one rabbit.

In special areas the rabbits, for no conceivable reason, swarmed over the barrens so thickly that viewed from an airplane they must have seemed like larvae crawling countlessly upon the blistered surfaces of some huge stale cadaver. Everywhere, though, their shapes—hunkered down in the scant patches of shadow, sitting bolt upright on their haunches, bobbing aimlessly about, all long ears and awkward hind legs—caught the eye. They were noticeably more numerous where the entryway into the Mallard's Nest converged, which easily was explainable. There, at the outlet of the bottle, was that shreddy, weedy oasis of verdure for them to feed upon. A jack-rabbit can find his victuals among the sage shoots; but he prefers something greener and juicier when he can get it.

To the struggling dwellers hereabouts the jacks were both a bane and a blessing. If in the rainy season the torrential downpours did not wash the seed out of their crumbly furrows, or, later, if the young plants by a miracle weathered the inevitable drought, it was certain that before harvest-time a regiment of rabbits would descend upon the farmer to devour his sickly grain or his hay.

They would be like a curse of locusts out of the Old Testament—as sharp-set as locusts and as hungry and with proportionately larger appetites. They

had been known to turn a ripened alfalfa patch into a stubble-field in a single night and then come back next night for a feast on the gnawed stems. Not even those painstaking feeders, the sheep, garnered so closely. But now that the state paid a price upon their heads and sent out agents to teach the devastated victims how by wholesale to trap and poison their most persistent enemy, many a man who faced utter ruin otherwise, fed his family through the winter on the accumulated bounty for his hare scalps.

He hauled his water in barrels for long miles; he dug juniper roots out of the frozen earth to provide firewood of a sort; he damned the cold and the bleak winds and the hard times and the unpeopled loneliness which on three sides imprisoned him, and between such stints he preyed on these foes that had through the short autumn been preying on him and his sparse little gleanings of provender. In brief, he was what the more prosperous West, partly in pity and partly in contempt, calls a dry-farmer.

Often he despaired and after a few seasons of heart-break took his beating and abandoned his sterile claim to the monotony out of which he had wrested it. Occasionally he gritted his teeth and hung on, being held by the instinctive craving of the peasant-stock Caucasian to keep his feet rooted in the dirt of his own freehold no matter how forlorn and drear the

holding or how hopeless a prospect for ultimate success this ownership might offer him and his brood.

If the proximity of water and its dependent pasturage drew the famished vermin to this immediate vicinity, it likewise had drawn settlers. Within the cupped basin, in the Mallard's Nest proper, was quite a sizable colony of cabins of stones or logs, each set near a corner of its section or quarter-section. There was one small frame church here and a log-built schoolhouse. There likewise was a general store, which also served, as a crudely lettered signboard above its door advertised, for a post-office.

Behind this particular building, which was the largest building of all, stood an object unusual in such a setting—a windmill, used for collecting water for the irrigation of the most promising truck patch, in fact almost the only sizable truck patch there. More remarkable yet, a few domesticated flowers bloomed about certain doors or edged the straggling vegetable gardens; and there was fair grazing for work-stock and milch-cows along the skirts of a very small stream which issued from under the bluff foot of Shivery Peak and ran a meandering course out and away through the enclosed strip of valley until it was sucked up by the desert beyond.

You might follow the line of the creek to where it was lost by the homesteads which fringed it; but also

you would notice, if you had heed for such things, that as the creek shrank the fickle vegetation lessened too, and the cabins became smaller, and that those who lived in these more distant and scattered cabins were almost always shabbier and more pinched-looking than their neighbors of the cove. The answer was plain—the more forethoughted among the first arrivals had preempted the best sites, those which the moisture made passably fertile; the rest had squatted upon what leavings remained. You might have guessed, though, that even the advantaged ones had been none too favored in their takings. Your guess would have been right, too.

By still another set of facts the residents in these parts were distinguished. Any American-born passerby, hearing their speech, would have known them for Southerners. What the average Northern-bred observer might not have discerned was that they hailed from somewhere in the southern Appalachians. It would take a Southerner, else one who had traveled the South, to detect the shadings of accent, the frequent use of quaint-sounding Elizabethan idioms which mark the hillsman breed of the Cumberlands as a race apart from the lowlander breed. Likewise they had brought with them out of their original environment certain tribal peculiarities and transplanted these in this vastly different environment—

a close-knit clan instinct, for instance, and a reticence toward strangers, a sort of defiant furtiveness, which sometimes might be mistaken either for dourness or for causeless suspicion.

Among them again and again recurred the same family names—Cyphers, Trantham, Dugmore, Sharpless, Ransom, Philjar. The Dugmores, as you soon would find if you tarried in this locality, were the most numerous, the Ransoms next. The men mainly were lean and angular, the women low-voiced and restrained; their children sometimes sulky and usually very ragged and generally, even at their play, strangely silent.

One of these children, a boy of seven or eight who dragged a lame foot, was engaged about midday in some childish undertaking in the grassless, boulder-studded dooryard of almost the most outlying cabin of all—a cabin set upon a knoll—when he heard across the distance a sound which made him halt in whatever he was doing, to listen. Then he saw something the first glimpse of which set him hobbling down toward the trail that wound around the foot of the rocky knob. The trail was no more than two tire tracks weaving through the scrub like a pair of headless, tailless yellow-gray snakes traveling in company and keeping exactly so far apart. But to the little cripple it was the most important road in this

world since it led out into the world. Nor was there about him now any suggestion of shyness. Eagerness sent him down-hill at a brisk shamble.

Lifting up out of a dry pocket came a rusty two-seated automobile, skewing and bumping over the rocky irregularities along the track, its approach heralded by its forced racketing and by the jack-rabbits which, bouncing up like popcorn from a hopper, either dodged from before it or raced along ahead of it like volunteer outriders. A young man in his shirt-sleeves sat at the steering-wheel, jockeying his mount to avoid the worst bumps and getting out of her every ounce of power the infirm engine would yield him. Seeing the little limping figure he checked down to a crawling gait.

"Hello, Cousin Boone, hello!" shouted the child. "Ain't you goin' to light and come in to see me and maw, Cousin Boone?"

"Not today, Rufus," answered the driver. "I'm in kind of a hurry today. Good-by, little chap."

"But didn't you bring me nothin' from the settlements—goodies or somethin'?" insisted Rufus. "You always do, Cousin Boone."

"Didn't have a chance this time—I was too busy. But next time I won't forget." He smiled, showing rows of even white teeth through the mask of dust on his face and waved his hand and whirled away

in a column of grit that was as fine and cloaking as so much powdered pumice. The disappointed child watched the progress of the careening car along the twin ruts until it swung into the vent and behind a jog in the rock spur. Then he crept back to his interrupted play among the gay-colored boulders on the ledge above.

Five minutes later, the lone traveler halted his car alongside the makeshift gasoline station at a corner of the general store and post-office inside the notch. He climbed out carrying in one hand a rather limp meal-sack and in the other a khaki coat which showed heavy bulges in the side-pockets, and darted into the front part of the building. From a clutter of barrels and boxes there emerged at his entrance a gaunt, whiskered, elderly man, catlike in his movements but with something in his look and bearing oddly suggestive of the wolf. No one else was present.

"Well?" he asked sharply, his voice keen and quickened. "Well?"

"It's done," answered the newcomer. "Come on back here a minute."

He led the way into ill-kempt living-quarters fenced off by a curtained doorway behind the heaped merchandise. The small rear room where he halted was a squalid cuddy; the woman's touch was lacking from it. The older man followed along swiftly, his lupine

eyes gleaming and his fingers clawing in the tangled jungle of his thick tawny, gray-streaked beard.

"I haven't got but a minute or two to spare," the younger man told him, his words tumbling out. "Well, I wasn't wrong—it was him all right!"

"Good!" exulted the storekeeper. "I only hope you plugged him."

"It was a temptation—but I resisted it." A grin flickered across the grimed face, then passed and left it serious. "Oh, it was him! I'd never seen him but once before in my whole life and I only a youngster then but, as I told you night before last, I was sure I remembered him the other day when I bumped into him in front of the Occidental. But I had to make certain. That's why I went back to town yesterday and watched him. Then I knew I couldn't be wrong. So not three hours ago I pulled it off—all by myself and according to schedule—at the water-tank in the cañon."

"Any shootin'?"

"None to speak of—and mighty little trouble. It was almost too easy to be exciting. Excusing one fellow, they were all as mild and gentle as guinea-pigs. I'll tell you the whole story some other time." His sentences fell in a sequence of swift staccatoes. "But not now—there's no time."

"And you cleaned him out—you got the stuff?"

His senior fairly was panting in his intensity, his eyes shifting from his informant's face to the burdens in the other's hands.

"Naturally—it's here." The latter shook the grain-bag.

"How much—in all?"

"I don't know yet. I was in too much of a rush to take stock. But, whatever it is, it's all here."

"Let's look now—now!"

"No time. You see, there was one hitch. Only one, but it was bad. Just as I was getting away my handkerchief slipped off my face—worse luck! In a second I had it pushed back but Hank Doheny saw me—they had Doheny along—and recognized me. I could tell by his look that he recognized me. That means they'll be hot after me. Probably they'll come here first to search.

"I wouldn't have come myself but there was nowhere else to go. Well, let them come. They don't know what we two know; that part of it's all in my favor." He nodded toward a smeared back window through which might be seen, across a small pasture lot, the bulking façade of Shivery Peak. "I'll have plenty of ammunition and I can stand them off, I reckon, but if the siege drags out I'll have to come back down sooner or later for a fresh supply of provisions. I'll be wanting to come down anyhow, when it's safe,

to get the news. Don't you try climbing up there to me—they might trail you and tumble to our secret. And don't forget the signaling arrangement. You've got the code in your mind. Keep it there."

"Hadn't you better leave that there poke with me?" The whiskered one made a clutching gesture.

"No, sirree! It'll be safer up there with me than it would be down below here where they'll be nosing about with search-warrants and all. Besides, having it gives me another advantage. If I'm anywhere near right in my guess as to what I've got here in this bundle, our man may be more anxious to get his property back than he'll be to see me jailed.

"That's enough of palavering for now." He made for the store, his elder at his heels. "Get that tin Lizzie of mine out of sight—you don't want to seem to be mixed up in this. Even so, they'll suspect you. And pass the word to the rest of our people here to keep their eyes open and their mouths shut—not that they wouldn't do that anyhow. Still, you tell them. I'm gone." He was out of the front door by now. "Just sit tight, you-all, and there'll still be a good chance to beat their game no matter how many of them come swarming in behind the sheriff. If they start from Gateway—which is probable, seeing that it's so much closer than Pekawa or Mullin's—they ought to be showing up by four o'clock this evening.

Well, let 'em come—I had my fun this morning, I may have some more fun before this thing is over with.” On that he was gone, doubling about the side of the building and making for the bushy undergrowth of the creek where it bisected the small meadow.

The fugitive had been right, excepting that the pursuers arrived shortly after three o'clock.

VII

To It Comes a Stranger

THAT beset master of men and moneys, Herbert Tendon, Esq., did not ride into the basin with the first party of man-hunters. He did not appear until twilight of the succeeding day, and then his appearance was downright clandestine, his stay brief, his manner flurried and, as you might say, bordering on the furtive. Plainly the strain of the suspense—or something—was wearing deeply upon Mr. Tendon. By spells he alternately was huffy and depressed.

He had a harassing night and day, though; that must be conceded. Following the hold-up of which he had been, so far as personal loss went, the only victim, he was—very much against his will and in spite of violent remonstrances to the train crew—conveyed on through to the end of the railroad. There at the Junction he had parted from his brother financiers the rotund Mr. Wise and the clerical-looking Mr. Shupmann, after a somewhat perturbed conference in which he did most of the talking and they the bulk



"**P**ASS the word to the rest of our people to keep their eyes open and their mouths shut."

of the listening. The burden of his remarks, if the truth must be known, was that these two gentlemen while proceeding eastward should strive to avoid interviews with reporters or other snoopy and inquisitive persons. Such statements as must be given out to the press would be given by him. Upon them he impressed the warning. This being understood and conceded, his associates reboarded the chartered private car and the car was switched across the yards and hitched to the Transcontinental Flier on the main line and presently had started off and away on the long lap to Chicago.

Next Mr. Tendon did a stint of long-distance telephoning and sent several rush telegrams, using a private code. Having communicated with the authorities and with private detective agencies in such scattered larger cities as lay within a three-hundred-mile radius, he doubled back on the afternoon train to Gateway, taking with him his ruffled native retainer Mr. Hank Doheny. En route he sounded Mr. Doheny touching on the personality and the associations and the antecedents, so far as Doheny knew them, of this Boone Ransom.

Mr. Doheny, who suffered spiritually from wounded sensibilities and physically from a badly swollen, badly bruised cheek, was more concerned with plans for vengeance upon the offending Ransom

and incidentally with hopes of winning the reward offered by his present employer than with matters which he deemed to be of lesser importance. Nevertheless Mr. Tendon gathered a considerable number of facts from Mr. Doheny and, if his expression offered clues to his true feelings, was not notably recomposed by this information.

Immediately on reaching Gateway he took pains to substantiate it by conferences with others who had first-hand acquaintance with the hillsmen's colony out at the Mallard's Nest. Between times he received the condolences of leading citizens; arranged with Mr. Endicott, publisher of the *Courier*, for a rush order of placards bearing a description of the train robber and naming the handsome sum which he stood ready to pay for the apprehension of the said Ransom and the recovery of certain stolen valuables, to wit, currency and private papers—Mr. Tendon in wording the notices laid strong emphasis upon the latter contingency—and then sent more telegrams in cipher.

His rearrival had been timed too late in the day for speech with the local sheriff. That officer with three of his deputies and a dozen or so of citizen aides already had departed for the Mallard's Nest. Immediately on receipt of the telephoned news of what had happened in Pipestone Cañon the sheriff organized his constabulary, and swore in its volunteer

members; and hours before Mr. Tendon's return the expedition set out by auto after a noble clamor and confusion of departure, which for the onlookers agreeably disturbed the calm of the Sunday afternoon. Sunday usually was such a dull day except for church-goers.

Mr. Holtzer, the mayor-banker, made a fine show of solicitude for the distinguished gentleman who, coming hither in the rôle of a potential benefactor, had so rudely been manhandled and robbed. The fervor of his commiserations was only equaled by the fervor of his regret for the indignities to which his new friend had been subjected. He said so repeatedly. He offered to motor Mr. Tendon to the whereabouts of the miscreant's supposed refuge either that same night or early the following morning. It was Mr. Holtzer's expressed opinion that so competent an executive as Mr. Tendon should be able to direct the search better than any other even though he were ignorant of the character of the country and the temper of its inhabitants; but Mr. Tendon, giving the reason that there yet remained much to be done which only he might do, desired that the trip be postponed until he gave the word. Meanwhile he read proof on the reward notices which Mr. Endicott's job press speedily printed, and arranged for men on horseback and in cars to carry them forth

and post them in conspicuous places over a county considerably larger than any of the smaller New England states.

Then he retired to his recently vacated rooms at the Occidental and remained there, seeing no callers during the evening and using the long-distance lines extensively. His demeanor before seeking the privacy of his former quarters might have betrayed to a skilled psychologist that Mr. Tendon was torn between a desire for swift and summary action and a secret reluctance against stirring abroad. However, there were no skilled psychologists in Gateway.

Although he fumed and fretted that second day over the failure of a courier to return with reports on the progress, if any, that overnight had been made by the sheriff's force, it was not until mid-afternoon he sent Mr. Holtzer word of his readiness to embark upon the sixty-mile run to the cove. On the way, Mr. Tendon, becoming suddenly moody, had little to say, and Mr. Holtzer diplomatically respected his silence. When a man of great affairs retired into himself to plot out a campaign of reprisals for injuries done him, it was not for any lesser soul to disturb these reveries. Mr. Holtzer flattered himself he had tact and discernment; else how could he have succeeded at the banking business and on top of that have been elected and reelected mayor?

VIII

Sheriff Rowley Loses His Temper

IT was quite dark when the car with its two jolted and travel-stained occupants lurched down into and on through the ravine where the clustering cabins of the homesteaders made yet blacker dots in the prevalent blackness, and halted in front of the one store in the Nest. The store was shuttered and seemingly untenanted. In fact only one or two of the houses they just had passed showed lights through the small windows. A sort of frosty silence filled the gloomy walled-in place, as though most of the dwellers had deserted it and those who remained had insulated themselves against intrusion.

Only about a huddle of pup-tents which had been erected on the scuffed turf facing the locked-in store were there signs of active life. The radiance of a log fire flickered upon the figures of three or four men. From this group one tall shape detached itself and advanced toward Mr. Holtzer's well-dusted car. That gentleman officiated for the introductions.

"Mr. Tendon," he said, "make the acquaintance

of Jeff Rowley, sheriff of our county. Mr. Rowley, this is Mr. Herbert Tendon, the famous promoter from New York City."

The capitalist's plump soft hand painfully was wrung in a viselike embrace.

"Met Mr. Tendon last week," began the sheriff. "Probably he wouldn't remember me, meeting so many people like he does . . . Well, gentlemen, hop out, won't you, and come on over to the fire and get yourselves thawed out while we're talking things over? It ain't as warm these nights as it might be. If you ain't had your supper the cook can make out to rustle you a bite and a cup of hot coffee. It's hungry work, driving."

Mr. Holtzer, who was both stiff and chilled, seemed minded to accept the invitation but relaxed with a little wince of resignation as Mr. Tendon made haste to say:

"No, if you don't mind, Mr. Sheriff, I'll stay right here in the car. We've—we've only got a little while to stay. And besides, considering everything, I wouldn't care to be seen by any of the people living around here—you get my point, I presume?"

Mr. Rowley did not get Mr. Tendon's point but it was only the part of politeness to pretend he did. He nodded.

"Not much chance of that," he said grimly. "Be-

fore we'd ever got here yesterday they'd already gone into their holes—most all of them—and pulled the holes in after 'em. I'm willing to bet you didn't see anybody at all, driving in here just now, except maybe the skirmishers that I've got posted right back yonder about half a mile."

"That's right. Come to think of it, we didn't," said Mr. Holtzer. "The only man we saw was one of your posse no doubt. He hailed us."

"Not a bit of doubt about it. These folks here are mostly kinfolks of the man we're after; you knew that, didn't you, Mr. Tendon?"

"Yes, so I've heard," said Mr. Tendon. "Well, what news?"

"Well, our man is here. It's this young fellow Boone Ransom, there's no disputing that part of it neither. We've got him all right."

"You've caught him then? You've got my private documents—and my money—that he robbed me of?" Mr. Tendon was shrilly vocal in his eagerness before the remembered need of caution made him sink his tones on the final words.

"Not exactly. When I say our man is here I don't mean we've actually got our hands on him—not as yet."

"Oh!" There was a tremendous load of disappointment in the exclamation.

"What I meant by that was that he's here or anywhere hereabouts. I've got a purty clear idea of where he is at this minute but I can't put my hand on him. If I could, he'd be over there in one of those tents, shackled-up and under guard, waiting for you to see if you could identify him."

"Well, if you know where he is why haven't you landed him?" demanded Mr. Tendon with a re-assumption of his old domineering manner. "What are you waiting for—Christmas?"

"Mr. Tendon, if you knew a little about this country or if it was daylight or even if the moon was up, so as you could get an idea of the layout around here, you wouldn't put that particular question in just that particular way." Sheriff Rowley seemed inclined to take offense.

"You just explain things and then Mr. Tendon will understand," interposed Mr. Holtzer in the soothing purr of a peacemaker. "Mr. Tendon is naturally a little bit disturbed by what's happened—having his plans all upset and his trip postponed and all."

"Let it go," said the sheriff, slightly mollified but still stiff with his dying resentment. "I guess I'd better go back and begin at the beginning. Then there won't be any excuse for anybody trying to insinuate that I ain't onto my job or not attending to my sworn duty. We picked up the first clue on

the way over. Two Basque sheep-herders that work for Olaf Christensen back northwest of here and about half-way over to Pipestone, they saw him pass yesterday just before dinner-time, headed this way and scooting along hell-bent for election. They know him and they know his car. One of 'em hailed him but he didn't stop. Didn't even slow up.

"Then, just out yonder beyond the mouth of this gut, I talked with Gabe Batts. He's about the only nester within five or six miles of here that ain't connected some way or other with this cove crowd, and from what I gather he ain't on what you'd call affectionate terms with some of them. He wouldn't care to do any loose gabbing. There ain't hardly a man living here but knows how to shoot, although Boone Ransom is probably the best shot in the lot, and besides, it's pretty well known that most of the old-timers amongst 'em were mixed up in one of those Southern feuds before they moved West. Gunning somebody they didn't like from behind a tree wouldn't bother them, probably.

"Still, Batts was willing to talk to me under pressure. I just happened to have something on him concerning a little cattle rustling that he was mixed up in a few years back, that's all. And I reminded him of it and he loosened up and on the dead q.t., he told me he saw Ransom hustling in here less than

an hour after the Baskies saw him. Then when we got in ourselves there was Ransom's car stuck away behind his cousin Barnaby Trantham's cowshed. So by all that, we knew he'd come in and hadn't gone back out.

"Nobody here—man, woman or child—wouldn't talk though. Most of 'em kept out of sight as much as they could—they're still doing that—and those that were stirring—well, gentlemen, you'd both been justified in thinking they'd gone practically deaf, dumb and mighty near blind, all at once. I took the sympathetic stand, if you get what I mean by that. I went around dropping remarks about Boone Ransom having always had a good reputation for law and order before this case broke—which is the truth—and saying he must have gone loony all of a sudden to do such a wild crazy thing, and intimating that if he'd just come out of hiding like a man and give himself up peaceable and turn over what stuff he'd packed off with him, that I'd be his friend same as I'd always been his friend, and do my best to get him out of the scrape easy. I'd say this, meaning it too, and then I'd start asking questions. Nothing doing.

"The smartest one here except probably Boone, and the best-off as far as property goes, is the postmaster and owner of this store here—old Anse Cyphers.

He's a sort of half-uncle or something to our man. Well, I went at Anse pretty strong. He was as close-mouthed as the rest though. All he'd say was that he didn't know where Boone was nor didn't care, and if we wanted to we could search his shebang again or any other house in the Nest—we'd already searched everywhere once—and then, right in the middle of my powwowing with him, doggone if that obstinate old cuss didn't quit on me and walk out behind his place to that windmill of his—you can just make it out from here—and start fiddling with it like as if getting it in proper running order was the most important thing in the world to him just then. What are you going to do, even if you are sheriff and got the authority behind you, with a bunch like that?

“So I didn't waste any more time on any of them. Anyhow, it was a cinch to locate our man. He'd come in and he hadn't gone out, so by that I knew he must be trapped up on Shivery—that's this here tall peak that rises up right behind us, Mr. Tendon. He'd naturally be bound to be there—not being anywhere else for him to hide. And so, it being sundown by that time and nothing to be gained by blundering around in the dark, I put out men to patrol, and the rest of us went under shelter for the night. You see, figuring there wouldn't anybody here take us in for love or

money, I'd brought along tents and bedding and some provisions.

"So nothing more happened until this morning early and then I got the absolute proof that I was right in my beliefs—through the assistance of your friend, this here loud-talking, gun-toting Hank Doheny.

"Doheny came busting in before daylight with blood in his eye and a lump on his jaw that would put you in mind of a young eggplant. It looked to me like somebody must have socked him one with a maul and he was hostile as a she-bear with cubs. He'd brought along three cow-hands from the Bent Y Ranch, six miles this side of Gateway. I guess he'd promised to cut up the prize money with them if they'd throw in with him, and besides, one of 'em professed to know the way to get up on Shivery.

"Well, nothing would do 'em but what they must put right out and ramble up the trail without waiting for breakfast even, and round up their man. I couldn't stop 'em—this reward you've offered, Mr. Tendon, is open to anybody that wants to earn it. But I did tell my crowd that none of them was to go along. We just stood by down below and watched for developments. We didn't have very long to wait. Doheny was leading the way when they started up and"—the sheriff chuckled at a little joke of his own

—“and, by gravy, he was still leading when they came back down, too!

“We just waited, all of us, like I’m telling you, and after about an hour or so we heard shooting up above on the first ledge—lots of shooting—and pretty soon here came Doheny’s crew all out of breath and looking powerful foolish. It seemed they’d got about six hundred feet up and was just starting across a place where the trail comes out of the brush into the open and winds across a steep stretch of bare rock, when bullets out of a repeating rifle began striking at their feet. Nobody was hit but from the way the bullets were spattering just in front of their toes they could tell that whoever was firing could pot ’em one by one any time he was a mind to.

“So they went into quarters in a sort of corner like, and still the lead kept pecking right around them, only now it came from a different direction and whoever was sending it seemed to be closer than he had been before and getting closer all the time, too. They couldn’t see anybody to shoot back at, neither. Then all of a sudden, from somewhere up over their heads, big boulders began bouncing down, first one side of them and then the other. So, being fellows that could take a hint as well as the next one, they decided they’d lost their appetite for man-chasing and they just adjourned out of there unanimous and *sine*

die, with the lead spattering behind them to hurry 'em along.

"I talked with one of 'em, a lengthy boy called Shuffle-Along Carter, who's got a kind of comical way of putting things. 'He must have flanked you, then?' I says to him.

"'Flanked, hell!' he says. 'Sheriff, he just naturally surrounded us. I never got dissatisfied so quick with a place in my life as I did hovering behind that cranny of rocks up yonder. There was only one thing,' he says, 'that kept me from leading the stampede when we broke to get out,' he says. 'I couldn't ketch up with Doheny. I'm quitting,' he says. 'I aim to be unselfish but, Sheriff, just between you and me I value my health more'n I do a slice of this here visiting Eastern money. If anybody should ask for me,' he says, 'you can tell 'em I was here but now I'm gone,' he says.

"I claim that Shuffle-Along boy's got sagaciousness," continued Sheriff Rowley. "I probably wouldn't be lingering myself only that's what the taxpayers expect me to do. But Doheny and the other two fellows stuck. They've staked out for the night at the head of the creek about two hundred yards up from here and are aiming, I understand, to stay for the finish and play a lone hand independent of me. Well, that's their business. Doheny ain't talking quite

so big as he did this morning before he had this setback, but I understand he's brewing some fresh war-medicine.

"Anyhow, getting back to the main subject, that's how I know where Ransom is—he's hid out somewhere up on the Peak."

"Why not go up yourself then and rout him out? You've got men enough, haven't you? Or do you want reinforcements?" Mr. Tendon asked.

"Humph!" The sheriff's grunt was scornful. "I give you a cordial invitation to try it yourself. Me, I've got a family to raise. We can't spot him—and he can spot us if he's watching. And he's watching all right, you can bet on that. Here's his ace in the hole: there's only one trail up Shivery, so far as anybody knows of, and it's no paved boulevard, believe me. And you have to stick to the trail. You can't go up anywhere, picking your own path same as you could with one of those toy mountains like you have back East. This is a regular old he-mountain.

"Between here and the top there are fifty places—yes, a hundred places—where one man could stand off a regiment, let alone a squad the size of mine. We'd be traveling Injun-fashion one behind the other—no chance to rush him. He could pick us off one at a time and never expose himself doing it neither. We'd have to make our move in broad daylight, too.

Going up in the night-time would be as much as a man's neck is worth. As you get nearer the top, the trail, they tell me, hangs on ledges not eighteen inches wide—with a drop of a thousand feet or so if you should miss your step or slip on a sliding scrap of shale or anything. Anyhow, it's likely Ransom's been smart enough to blockade it off, somewhere along there, by racking up big boulders. Holtzer'll tell you I'm no quitter, Mr. Tendon, and I could use that money as well as the next one; but I'm not ready yet to throw away my own life or the lives of any of these men just for the fun of it."

"But suppose he slips down himself and gets away on you in the dark while you're hanging back?" Mr. Tendon plainly was becoming wrought up despite manifest efforts to maintain the truce of courtesy. "Are you willing to be responsible for taking that risk?"

"A-ah, but that's where we've got our hole card. I've already moved the main bunch of my men right spang up against the foot of the trail and made a new camp. There are two men on the watch there now that I can trust and they'll be relieved at midnight by two more. Then, day and night, I'll have some more good men walking beats east of here where this little valley narrows in—where you passed a couple of fellows doing sentry duty a while ago. You must

have noticed that to pass them you have to run across a path of bright glare? Well, I'm using automobile headlights facing each other to light up that stretch and doing the same thing up above, only there I've got the lights shining diagonally up the trail. A mouse couldn't slip by without being spotted, let alone a grown man.

"That's my scheme in a nutshell. If Ransom comes down he's first got to fight his way through a whole bunch out in the open, with odds of at least eight or ten against him. If he succeeded at that—which he wouldn't—he'd still have to get past the fellows on guard down yonder in the pocket—this is a one-way road, Mr. Tendon. Oh, he's cornered all right. All we've got to do is sit tight and keep our eyes peeled and wait for him to get so hungry he can't stand it any longer. He must have toted some grub up there with him wherever he is, but it can't last him long and he can't live forever on ground-squirrels and gophers and quill-pigs neither. Sooner or later he'll be starved out, and then watch him walk into our welcoming arms with his backbone sticking to his stomach, and take his medicine like a nice little man. I give him, say, ten days or two weeks at the most."

"But if he crawled down the other side of this mountain of yours? Who's to keep him from doing that, I'd like to ask?"

"God Almighty, that's who!" The touchy Rowley was bridling again, his voice raspy and short. "You see, it so happens that there ain't but one side to this mountain, as you might say. It's a right funny mountain in this regard. Just over the top where you're looking now, there's an old rock slide that once upon a time shaved the whole face of the peak away as smooth and straight as a board standing on end. A bighorn sheep couldn't go up or down that slice, let alone a man.

"North of there she hooks onto the peaks further in by a long saddle-backed ridge that nobody ever has gone along yet and nobody ever will—it's too sharp and too sheer, and besides, it's broken clean across in one spot by a straight up-and-down gap that's two hundred feet wide and the Lord knows how deep. That leaves the part that's rearing up in front of us. On one flank of this front is the tall rock wall yonder to your left—I wish it was brighter so you could make it out. Nothing but a bird can get into or over that stone pile. It's too rough and too steep for a human being even to try it and there's a million tons of loose rock everywhere just waiting to tumble down with you.

"Then, just alongside on your right, jamming right up against this other flange of the peak, is the second biggest lava bed in this state. Try to go over that

lava bed lengthwise, crosswise or cater-cornered, and inside of ten minutes you'd have the shoes cut off your feet and five minutes more of that would cut the meat off the bottoms of your feet clean down to the bone. So you see, our man's hedged in. There's only just the one route for him to come down and when he does come—why, we'll be waiting for him. How does that notion strike you?" From his voice and manner he might have been explaining a puzzle to a captious child.

"I don't like it at all," proclaimed Mr. Tendon. "I hate this delay—I want action. I want that man as soon as possible, dead or alive, and I want what he's got on him that belongs to me. It's vitally important to get him as soon as possible. But I'd rather have him dead than alive—remember that, Mr. Sheriff." His tone was venomous.

"You'll have to let me use my own judgment there, I guess," said the sheriff, now drawling his words seemingly with deliberate intent further to irritate the Easterner. "But if you've got any bright ideas of your own you're at perfect liberty to try 'em out, seeing you're paying the bills." He shrugged his shoulders eloquently and shifted his body into profile as if about to quit them. "Oh yes—I've been so busy trying to make you understand how the situation stands, I was almost forgetting one thing: Doheny

let it drop today that he had it from you that you was shipping in a crew of city detectives or government secret agents or something. Any truth in that?"

"Yes, there is," assented Mr. Tendon testily. "My information over long-distance is that the manager of a private agency with two of his operatives will be here tomorrow morning, coming overland from Portland. His name is Clyde. He's ready to cooperate with you or to work independently, just as you please. I trust you have no objection?"

"Nary an objection," said the sheriff airily. "The more the merrier. But if this smart new hired hand of yours has got any ambition to stroll up Shivery and, all by his own little self, to fetch down Boone Ransom, that's one of the keenest shots in the whole Northwest, I'd advise him leaving his home address behind him so's I'll know where to ship the remains before they start spoiling on me. . . . Good night, Holtzer. Tell Mantz at the wholesale grocery I'll be wanting a fresh jag of provisions freighted out before the end of the week, will you? I left an order with him—he'll know what to send."

Ignoring Mr. Tendon in his farewell and without renewing his earlier offers of hospitality, he clunked, a sullen antagonistic figure, toward the firelight.

"Go ahead, Holtzer; turn around and let's get out of here," snapped Mr. Tendon. "We've got a long

rough ride ahead of us." He peered about him almost fearsomely. "This place gives me the creeps anyhow. From now on I'll do my campaigning from a distance. And if we should meet anybody on the way out—any of the natives, I mean—let's not speak to them. You understand?"

"I understand perfectly," said Mr. Holtzer, although he didn't in the least understand. He didn't ponder over the riddle of it though. Mr. Holtzer already was tired and now he was beginning to get sleepy. This astute banker was in the habit of retiring at 9 P. M. He knew the early bird catches the worm with a note to be shaved.

IX

The Fugitive Hears Some News

IT was on Monday evening that Mr. Tendon paid his one surreptitious call to the Mallard's Nest. On Thursday night it rained—the first real rain of the young, short fall, a stiff torrential downpour, which made little spouting cataracts on slanted places all through the high country and dampened the bedding where the members of the sheriff's posse slept in huddled alignment beneath tarpaulin roofs that sagged amidships and leaked at the seams.

The possemen had no unwelcome monopoly of the soggy discomfort. Hard by, things were not one bit pleasanter inside the makeshift canvas lean-to which the dour Mr. Doheny shared with his companion ranch-hands. The weather wore upon his nerves, and in his interchange of remarks with his tentmates his feelings graphically were reflected. The recruits began to regret that they had enlisted for an undertaking which had taken on so static an aspect. One of them confided to his bedfellow that unless she cleared up in the morning he was liable just to up and

pull his freight. Because he was constituted to stand just so much jawing and no more. Such, he stated, was the kind of a fellow he was, and he didn't care who knew it.

Between that Monday and this Thursday, divers minor events had befallen at the common rendezvous of the besiegers under the steep and, for the time being, impregnable battlements of Shivery Peak. None of these, though, had altered the situation as it had prevailed from the beginning of the week. According to announcement, the special agent from Portland—the man Clyde, named by Mr. Tendon—joined forces with the rest on Tuesday. He was accompanied by two underlings—both, like him, well-set-up and mannerly and competent-looking individuals. Others came in, affiliated or otherwise. Three of Sheriff Rowley's civilian aides wearied of that tiresome waiting game which the sheriff had decreed as the game to be played and, having been relieved by more patient substitutes, they went home. A pilgrimage of tin-canners on their sightseeing way to Quartz Lake forty miles down the state detoured in from the main highway running north and south through the desert.

The magnet which drew them was curiosity to look upon the palisaded retreat where a runaway from justice was believed—was known, in fact—to be lurking and defying arrest and all attempts to invade

his fastness. To be sure, there had been only one such attempt and it speedily repulsed, but these visitors plainly hoped to be eye-witnesses to something at least equally exciting. Finding nothing afoot that was exciting, barring two active and continuous seven-up tournaments, they expressed disapprobation for proceedings so widely advertised and yet so commonplace, and after sundry vain efforts to engage in conversation with the aloof residents, they took themselves away again.

On Thursday afternoon shortly before the storm broke, there also was a young woman visitor, one who traveled alone in a car fitted for cross-country touring. She remained a little while, attracting some covert attention on the part of the dwellers—unattached women were rare here off the beaten routes of travel—and then she too drove away. There will be more about this young woman shortly.

Mr. Tendon's imported representative succeeded where his sponsor had failed; promptly he established an amicable liaison with Sheriff Rowley. Any traces of a lingering professional jealousy which the sheriff might have had vanished after his first meeting with young Clyde. The latter expressed his approval of Mr. Rowley's plan of operation; he made it plain that he and his two assistants were at Rowley's disposal for any future movements.

"I'm not here to try to run things," he explained. "It strikes me you've got this job pretty well in hand, and my men and I will gladly cooperate with you any way we can. Of course if I should cook up some private scheme of my own for circumventing this fellow Ransom, I reserve the right to try it out."

"Go as far as you like," consented the sheriff heartily. "You don't look exactly like a greenhorn to me."

"Well, I was born and reared back on the Eastern seaboard, but I've been out West long enough to know something about this sort of country. I've been something of an outdoor man, too. I promise not to make a nuisance of myself by getting lost or taking any unnecessary risks."

"I'll take a chance on you," endorsed the sheriff. "I'd like for you and your two boys to throw in and mess with my gang," he added. "You probably wouldn't find anybody living around here who'd accommodate you, and I notice you ain't brought any camp plunder with you."

"Much obliged," said Clyde. "We'll do that very little thing. We'll rustle our duffel-bags out of my car and dump them in one of your tents."

"Put yours in my tent," said the sheriff, warming to this agreeable, spry young man. "You can lunk in with me—if you don't mind a line of plain and

fancy snoring. My wife says I'm a caution when it comes to snoring."

"Thanks again. I may be off today on a little independent scouting trip of my own. I just want to spy out the lay of the land and so forth. But I'll be in and out from now on, I expect."

"You'll get nothing out of this glum bunch of dry-farmers." The sheriff waved his arm to include the entire territory roundabout. "We ain't exactly popular, seeing what our purpose is."

"I'd already gathered as much," said Clyde, smiling as he thought back on certain small rebuffs already suffered by him in his preliminary overtures among these morose mountain-folk. "I don't expect to hear much—my main hope is to see something."

Shortly afterward, with a sandwich in his pocket, he set out alone in his light runabout and was away during most of the day. He also was absent for an hour or two after nightfall, going this time afoot. When he returned shortly before bedtime, he told Sheriff Rowley he would be leaving immediately for his office in the city.

"It so happens," he explained, "that there are some details to be attended to in connection with my business which nobody else can handle. That's why I'm going instead of sending Conway or Wilgus. I've instructed them while I'm away to obey any orders you

may give. I'll be back not later than day after tomorrow—if I can make the train connections."

That was that.

Thursday about sunset—the sunset not being visible, though, by reason of heavy black clouds thickening in the westward—the rain broke and the rival contingents—Rowley's outfit and the Doheny trio hard by—deserted their drowned camp-fires and took cover. The sheriff's sentries on post at the two strategic points had an exceedingly wet time of it. Their comrades, swearing under their sodden flies, were in only slightly better plight. Every blanket sucked up moisture like a wick, and a cotton coverlet became a dank and spongy and repellent thing. Nevertheless those who enjoyed the insufficient sheltering of tent-cloths were sound asleep long before ten o'clock when the storm died in a series of violent valedictory spatters. The tilted horn of a young moon rode mistily through a wrack of shredding cloud-stuff where the sky showed clearing signs above the lava bed, when there came a cautious knock, thrice repeated, at the rear door of the living-quarters behind Postmaster Anderson Cyphers's locked and shuttered store.

No one, however vigilantly he watched the building from without, would have suspected the proprietor might be astir. But he was, and a dim light from a

coal-oil lamp burned in his living-room, its glow shrouded against outside detection by a quilt which was drawn across the one small window. For more than an hour now the bearded inmate had been coiled there on the side of the bed in the gloom, his uneasy fingers exploring his beard.

When the summons came at his door he stood up but took no further move until the sound was repeated—three short raps, then a pause, then three more. Satisfied then, he padded across the bare floor, his stockinged feet making no sound, and pushed back the bolts and drew the door open barely far enough to admit the entrance of one person.

Someone slipped in out of the murky night and old Anse closed the door and rebarred it. He turned the lamp-wick higher. Before him stood his kinsman, Boone Ransom. The refugee was sopping wet. His boots left watery tracks on the planking, and his slouch hat, as he took it off and shook it, cast a little spray against the nearer wall.

"Sorry weather fur travelin'," said the storekeeper.

"Tell me something I don't know," answered the younger man cheerily. "Coming down, I was wading when I wasn't sliding. But it's a good night for me to be stirring—couldn't ask a better. I'm needing another grubstake. That's what brought me—that and the prospect of hearing some news." He stepped

toward the communicating doorway, then hesitated. "Safe to go on in?"

"Go 'long," said Cyphers, who scuffled behind him bearing the lamp. "I chinked 'round the shutters with rags. I stuffed the crack under the front door-sill, too."

Reassured, the exile lifted the tattered calico curtain and next was in the store making swift selections from various opened boxes and cases.

"Well, how do things stand here?" he asked.

"Well, to begin with, thar's Rowley's passel—"

"Knew that already." The lithe figure shifted toward a shelf of tinned goods.

"And Doheny and two of his pet ijiots, they're here. One left after that skeer you throwed into 'em Monday last past."

Ransom laughed under his breath, as over a pleasant reminiscence.

"I did sort of burn up the trail behind them," he confessed. "I've got a feeling somehow that Doheny likes me less and less all the time. Well, what other visitors are you entertaining, if any?"

"Three furriners callin' themselves private detectives," stated Cyphers.

"Aha! Through my glasses I thought I made out some strange figures. How do you size them up—as dangerous or otherwise?"

"I'd call one of 'em—the head man—I'd call him mebbe dangerous. He's away tonight. I'll tell you about him: he's kinder given to sneakin' round. But Rowley's notion is to starve you out." He displayed snagged yellow teeth in a derisive grimace, which partly was smothered behind his whiskers.

"Is that so?" Ransom grinned back at him impishly. "Well, such being the case, I'll take a whole side of that bacon yonder and six cans of corned beef instead of four."

"Yes, son, that's Rowley's idee. But this here young furriner—Clyde's his 'tittlemint, Julian Clyde—he's too fond of projeckin' hisse'f around where he don't belong to suit me." Cyphers was making a pack of the chosen foods and bestowing it within burlap sacking. "He's the one I mainly want to tell you about. He got in Tuesday—him and his partners. And inside of an hour I ketched him hangin' round my back lot whar I was fixin' to flash you the reg'lar signals fur the day. I told him he was trespassin' on private property and fur him to git off and stay off. He snuck away and rid off in his car.

"I watched and I seen his car stop about two miles off yonder-ways, clos't up under the shadder of the rock wall. That made me uneasy. I was 'feared lest he might find out somethin' thar that wouldn't be fur your good. I putt your cousin Barnaby in here

to keep keer of things and I follered him. Sure enough he was prowlin' in the thick timber up the side of the mounting, not very fur frum whar the secret way that you used tonight comes down out of the brush. He wasn't very nigh to it but, even so, too nigh. I let him see me comin' 'long behind him and with that he back-tracked and wint back to his car and got in her and rid off and was gone all day. He left that night, but come back ag'in this evenin' about five o'clock, stayed not more than a quarter or a half and putt out ag'in."

"I don't like that—this busybody scouting on my private territory." A trace of worry reflected itself in the younger conspirator's face. He emerged from behind the dented counter. "What's he up to, do you suppose?"

"I'm a-comin' to that. You ain't needin' to pester about him—fur the time bein' anyhow. He's off after somebody else that there's a reward fur."

"Somebody else, did you say?"

"Yes, and whut's more, a woman."

"A woman!"

"That's whut I'm tellin' you. And furthermore yet, a young one—a young likely one. I seen her myself. Gord, if only I'd knowed then!" There was a lament in this last disclosure.

"Yes, boy," Cyphers went on, taking a sort of joy

that was tinctured with a melancholy regret in his recital. "Yes, boy, seems like this is gettin' to be a pop'lar neighborhood fur folks that the law of the land is after and willin' to pay a head-price fur—whut with fust you, nephew, and then this here one."

"What are you driving at, Uncle Anse?" demanded the young man, coming closer. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"Don't rush me off my feet. I'm a-comin' to somethin' now that'll make you pop them eyes of yourn wider open than whut they already are now. Here's how it come about: 'Long about three o'clock this evenin' I was lollin' out thar in front of this store when a car loaded with campin' plunder pulled round the corner. A woman was drivin' it—by herself. She was dressed like these here outlandish furrin women dresses sometimes in these parts—you know, like a man, with boys' breeches on and all. I'm tellin' you she wasn't no ill-favored one." His close-set eyes glittered curiously under his tufts of brows, and through their shaggy maskings his parted lips drew back, and the younger man, with an inner revulsion, saw how bits of slaver had formed at the corners of the older man's mouth.

"Never mind that," he said shortly. "I know how you feel about certain things. Go on—she drove up and stopped, and then what?"

"She wanted gas. She axed me the way to Quartz Lake—seemed like frum whut she said she'd got off the main road and drifted into the cove thinkin' she still was on the main track. I give her directions and she paid me and spunned round and driv out ag'in. I studied her clos't though—young and slick and well-formed, she was." He lingered—and in his lingering there was something unwholesome, something loathly—on the remembered image of this transient he described. "Ef only I'd knowed then!"

"Known what?"

"Hold your hosses—you're goin' to know now. Well then, right on her heels and not two hours behind her, comes this here Clyde, pikin' back frum wharever he's been at these two days last past. A little smidgen of time sooner and he'd 'a' met her before she got out on the desert ag'in. I thought fust-off he mebbe had passed her because the fust thing he done was ast me had I seen arything of a stranger woman. 'Spicionin' naught out of the way, I tells him yes—tells him whut-all she looked like and whut-all she said to me and which-a-way it was she'd claimed to be movin' in. Then he pumps me about Quartz Lake, and me I tells him that, too, still bein' in the dark.

"Then he says to me, he says, 'Does this look anythin' like her?' And with that he hauls a rolled-up

piece of this here stiff printin' paper out and shows me a picture that's on it.

"I says to him, 'Yes, that's that gal's favorin'-image. That's shore her true presentimint whut you got thar,' I says. But a minute later I was wishin' my tongue had clove to the roof of my mouth before I spoke them betrayin' words, because then he says to me, he says: 'Brother, you overlooked a bet. Uncle Sam wants that young lady mighty bad—he wants her five hundred dollars' worth. She was a postal clerk in Boise City, Idaho,' he says, 'and she's to be tuck up on sight fur pilferin' of the mails. I got word yistiddy she mout be at large somewhars in these parts—got it along with this reward notice,' he says. 'I picked up some sign comin' along this way but I didn't know the trail was so hot as all this,' he says. 'Why,' he says, 'I almost dropped in in time to corral her. But I'll git her,' he says. 'Ef she's at the upper end of that lake I'll ketch her by tonight and ef she's gone on down to the fur end, I'll nab her thar bright and early in the mornin'. I've got a machine here,' he says, 'that kin outrun whut she's travelin' in. I'll git her myself,' he says, 'and turn her in and lay claim to the prize-money and then be back here in due and ample time to help 'tend to the further case of this bright young friend of yourn that's playin' hy-spy with us up yon mounting-peak,' he says.

“‘Want to go ’long with me?’ he says, sort of grinnin’, like ez ef he knowed full and well I couldn’t leave here with you to be purtected and warned. I tells him no.

“‘That’s too bad,’ he says, grinnin’ yit more. ‘It must be mouty pressin’ business to keep you fast-rooted w’en there’s money to be picked up so clos’t by—and so easy. Mebbe,’ he says, ‘mebbe I mout count you in fur a little piece of it by reason of you havin’ give me this tip, even though ’twould be yore bounden duty to help me anyhow, you bein’ sort of in the gover’mint service yourself, and me bein’ a Federal agent on the side,’ he says.

“‘I could ’a’ tore his throat out with my bare hands to think how I’d missed the chance to lay holt on that there well-favored gal.” Curses flowed out over the hillsman’s licking tongue and flecks of the slobber fell on his beard. He mastered himself and went on:

“‘So then he whirls his car around and off he goes, fast and faster. But just ez he’s fixin’ to start he says to me, ‘Here,’ he says, ‘I’ve got an extry one of these here notices advertisin’ the lady,’ he says, ‘and they’re meant to be posted on post-offices and other public places. You mout like to nail it up on your door-post,’ he says. ‘Why,’ he says, ‘fust thing you know you’ll have quite a collection of these reward notices here in this gulch—whut with Boone Ransom’s already

stuck up and now with this handsome gal's to go alongside it. You take it,' he says, 'I'll still have a couple to spare.' And he shoves it into my hand before I can say him yea or nay.

"But I ain't posted it up—I ain't aimin' to. I been keepin' it by me. I like to look at it. Lookin' at it makes me have mixed feelin's all at the same time—sort of curious mixed-up feelin's. Crave to see it?"

"Of course I do."

Cyphers felt inside the unbuttoned breast-flap of his flannel shirt and brought forth a scrolled oblong of cardboard, warm and moist from contact with a hairy body. The younger man took it eagerly and spread it out flat. He studied the likeness printed at the top immediately beneath the legend in heavy black type—**FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD**—a fair enough half-tone of a woman in her early twenties, whose eyes looked straight out from the printing, whose bare throat rose as a smooth rounded column from the half-shown collar of a tailored bodice. Then, his eyes shifting downward, he read the accompanying printed matter.

To begin with, the name: Joan Powers was the name given; the description: age, twenty-three; occupation, civil-service employee, formerly a school-teacher; height, medium; weight, 110 pounds; hair, brown and cut short; eyes, dark gray; complexion,

fair; bodily movements, active; education, a college graduate; fond of outdoor recreations; expert motorist; ancestry, American; distinguishing marks, none—so on and so forth; the customary summary. Below at the bottom, brief mention of the crime alleged and the addresses of the authorities to be communicated with in the event the accused should be overtaken.

He read it through and considered the reproduced photograph again for a long minute, then thrust the paper back into Cyphers's hands as though the touch of it to his fingers had been distasteful.

"She's almost a beauty—if this picture half does her justice," he said, speaking to himself rather than to his companion.

"Didn't I tell you? And her slimsy little body—"

"Cut that out!" His rebuke was curt. "And she doesn't look like a thief to me, either. She looks honest. Well, I had a reputation not long ago for being reasonably honest myself." He laughed mirthlessly.

"Speakin' of that, how much was in the poke—in dollars and cents? You didn't tell me before—I been thinkin' and wonderin'. How much does it all come to, son?" In the poor light Cyphers's eyes burned with a vivid greenish gleaming—like the eyes of a cat peering forth from a deep shade.

His musing kinsman seemed not to have heard him.

"I hope they don't catch her," he said. "I hope she gives them the slip and gets away. Man-hunting is a poor enough trade, sometimes, I think. But when it comes to running down a young woman and sticking her in a dirty cell—pah!"

"You ain't told me whut-all was in the poke?"

"No, and I'm not going to tell even you that yet—you nor anyone else. I've got my reasons." The visitor's manner became decisive. "My pack's ready, eh?" He took it up, slipping the loops in the cords which compactly bound it over his arms to his shoulders so that the parcel rested on the flat of his back. "I'm gone," he said, "till next time, whenever that may be." He tiptoed out of the store.

Cyphers, still wheedling for information, came lurching and grudgingly unfastened the rear door for him. As the youth slid through the narrowed opening, his farewell words were a repetition of his wish.

"I hope they never catch her," he said. In an instant more the darkness blotted him out.

The storekeeper, having barred himself in again, stood where he was. His dredging fingers were busy under his chin; they were like crooked grapnels that clawed at faded masses of kelp. He seemed more goat than wolf now—a shaggy, stooped satyr plotting designs of dark malignant magic. His splay feet by right should have turned to pointed cleft hoofs; little

horns should have been sprouting from his thatch of hair.

He stood there motionless and quiet for a long minute. Then he parted his lips and let forth a spew of vain and vicious obscenity. He had sustained two such grievous disappointments!

X

A Forenoon with the Pelky Family

IT was late in the season for campers. Almost every clear night now the frost fell sharply on the nearer uplands, and farther back the tall peaks were showing a thickening of those white caps which some of them, like incorrigible Ku Kluxers, never left off. With dusk there came always, down on the flats below, a chronic wind, which had a presumptuous way of tunneling under the side walls of a tent and searching for the feet and the nose and the ears of a sleeper.

Along invisible lanes which followed the ragged coast of the desert went orderly wedges of geese honking high and flying fast, and beneath them on lower levels, compact but irregular bodies of ducks all scudding south for the marshes nearer the state boundary. Toward evening the sky would be etched with the streaking, shifting hieroglyphics that the wild fowl wrote there, and after dark when the vagrant flocks slid down toward earth to seek for roosting-grounds and feeding-grounds, the lofts of the night-time were filled with the silken thunder of their

beating wings and with the gabble of garrulous mallards, and now and then the buglings of great, querulous swans, sounding clear and very near—the trumpet calls of a passing unseen legion.

On the air the myriad riders of the air became daily more numerous and hourly more vocal as the urge for migration laid hold on them. On the face of the land, though, there were fewer and yet fewer human wayfarers to be met.

A month before, the tourists' grove at the foot of Quartz Lake had sheltered on some days as many as twenty separate lodges of those new breeds of our native gipsies—those respectable truants from respectable homes, who, having set out from anywhere, bound for anywhere, to see America first over the gunwales of their burdened cars, catch the pleasant disease of the uneasy heel, and becoming irresponsible wanderers, go cruising south with the robins in the fall and north with the strawberry blossoms in the spring, or east or west, as the notion may take their itinerant fancies, in the summer-time. But that had been months back. On this fine, fresh rain-cleansed morning just two cars stood among the pines where the shore fluted down with gentle undulations to the clear waters.

One of these cars had started out in life as a five-passenger car—that is, if none of the five was overly

plump—but by virtue of necessity had risen to the dignity of being a veritable wain for a veritable caravan. Through a miracle only to be achieved on behalf of its crew of nomadic owners it transported from place to place two fairly sizable adults and four lusty juveniles, also their high-piled two-wheeled trailer, their portable belongings, their camping cargoes, their food supply and their dog. However, the dog was no more than a puppy. He could be tucked away almost anywhere.

This car, laden like a sumpter-mule, had labored with its tow to the present site two days before, and within half an hour after it disgorged its occupants—as it were, from every pore—they apparently were as much at home as though all six of them had spent their lives in this pleasant fringe of woodland. The titular chief of the transients immediately had made himself intimate friend and adviser to Mr. George Starr who lived close by with his wife and sold butter, home-made bread, fresh honey, fishing-tackle and two kinds of eggs—hens' eggs for personal consumption, preserved salmon eggs for trout bait—to visitors. To Mr. Starr he introduced himself as Mr. Caspar Pelky, from Red Oak, Iowa, by profession journeyman plasterer; next enumerated his family, leading off with Mrs. Millie Pelky, his esteemed helpmate, and after this, or so soon as he could sort them out

from a sort of involved but friendly snarl, identified their joint offspring—Adrian, aged nine; Caspar Junior, aged eight; Evangeline Maud, aged six (for some reason a whole year apparently had been frittered away between these two), and finally the baby, Master John J. Pershing Pelky, aged five—and wound up in an outpouring gush of confidence by stating that they'd had one swell time of it out West, but would be sort of glad to get back to Red Oak to den up until time to start out again next year, because after all was said and done, there's no place like home, but had tarried for him to have just one more flirt at the fish, but would have to be jogging along in a day or two now before the deep snows caught them going through the passes of the Rockies, but hoped, one and all, to come again another time.

Pausing at this point for breath before making further disclosures, Mr. Pelky was shrilly besought by his lady, she desiring to know about how many weeks it was going to take him to rustle a little dry fire-wood for her folding stove and fetch up a couple of buckets of drinking water. Or did he think it might run into months? At this, Mr. Pelky had bestowed upon Mr. Starr the understanding wink which one long-suffering husband gives only to a brother in affliction and had said:

“Scuse me a minute, George, will you, old man?”

My better half-wit—that's my pet name for the old woman behind her back—it seems like she craves a little attention. See you later!"

He had seen Mr. Starr later, and again and frequently the succeeding day and now on this following morning was seeing him once more. The two gentlemen stood together on a convenient elevation. With appraising but appreciative intentness they were regarding from a distance of perhaps forty yards the owner of the only other remaining car in the grove. This owner—presumed that she was such—had driven in and made camp the night before and now, with a display of considerable deftness, was tidying up after an individual breakfast. The person under scrutiny was a young woman.

Another also was watching that same young woman—not constantly but at frequent intervals. From her station before her own tent-flaps Mrs. Pelky, with two fists on two buxom hips, was engaged in the difficult but to her not quite impossible task of looking practically three ways at once. She was keeping one eye on her youngest, who once more, as on several earlier occasions, was developing a suicidal tendency with respect to the near-by landing-dock and the skiffs hitched there; and she was keeping another eye on the fascinated Mr. Pelky, watching him to see if he still was watching; and she was keeping yet another eye—

that would give her three eyes in all, but Mr. Pelky frequently said she sometimes seemed to have them spangled all over her like a spider or something—on the young woman in question.

Whenever she did this last, the observant matron from time to time sniffed in a warlike manner. She disapproved utterly of her new neighbor. In the first place the new neighbor had not been neighborly. In the second place she was young and—even the dispraising Mrs. Pelky privately admitted this to herself—not entirely lacking in a certain surface comeliness. In the third place she did not adhere, as her present silent critic did, to the sartorial ethics almost universally in vogue among lady tin-canners. She did not wear the maidenly pink boudoir cap nor the middy blouse nor the dropsical knickerbockers which were a feminine concession to outdoor living, nor yet the silk stockings and the customary high-heeled slippers. She was mannishly attired—immodestly so, Mrs. Pelky would have said—in tan riding-breeches, which added insult to injury by fitting her and by being becoming as well, and in high-laced boots and an open-throated brown flannel shirt and a hat like a Boy Scout's hat. She smoothly was belted in at the waist; she odiously was trig and trim in all regards.

And in the fourth place she had, ever since her arrival, studiously been concerned with minding her

own business. Right away Mrs. Pelky mentally had indexed her as a "stuck-up thing"; she now was amplifying the original diagnosis—this not only was a stuck-up thing but looked like a "fast piece," which was even worse. Pretending as though she did not know those goggle-eyed flirts—and they both married at that and one the father of a family besides—were staring at her as though they'd never seen a brazen tomboy before in their whole lives! The outraged wife took steps.

"You Caspar Senior!" she shouted piercingly.

"What?"

"Come here!"

"What for?"

"I said come here, didn't I?"

Mr. Pelky came, endeavoring, without notable success, to look blameless and quite at his ease. Mr. Starr followed him with somewhat a guilty diffidence.

"I thought you told me you was going fishing to-day?" inquired the lady.

"I am," replied her husband.

"Then go."

"But—"

"I said go. And when I say fishing, I mean fishing for fish!"

"Well, I'm just startin', ain't I?"

"You are that! I'll see to it myself."

But Mrs. Pelky did not see to it and her liege lord did not start. Because just then a third car slid into the grove and stopped, and from it emerged a competent-appearing young man who, approaching them, bade everybody good morning and then, passing on, hailed the young person beyond by a name—it sounded to Mrs. Pelky like Powers, and was—hailed her by a name which caused her to start up from her breakfast dishes and back away from him with quick glances this way and that as though meditating flight.

"I want you!" they heard him saying with a businesslike authority in his voice. "You're under arrest."

An announcement so sensational sent the audience of three down-hill to where the newly arrived stranger faced his quarry. But, as Mrs. Pelky afterwards stated, she wasn't the least mite astonished to hear it; it was only that she'd been taken sort of by surprise. A trio of young Pelkys quit whatever they clamorously were doing and closed in, also round-eyed. Little John J. Pershing was the only absentee. Those alluring skiffs were drawing him even as the candle draws the moth, to a yet more dangerous proximity.

"You're under arrest," repeated the young man, "and it's my bounden duty to warn you that anything you may say may be used against you."

Speaking on beyond her, he offered explanation to the stirred bystanders:

"I'm the manager of a private detective agency in Portland. Clyde's my name—Julian Clyde. At present I'm acting as a special secret-service agent for the United States government. If any of you are interested I'll show you my credentials. They're right here"—he tapped a breast pocket—"along with a circular calling for the arrest of this woman. She's wanted for robbing the mails in Idaho—a felony."

Mrs. Pelky, deeply entranced by these extraordinary exposés, nodded briskly to indicate that she, for one, well understood that the charge might be very serious indeed.

"I call upon you people to bear witness that I located her and overtook her without outside assistance. Her name—she may be traveling under an alias, but her name as given in the reward notice is Joan Powers. Do you deny that your name is Joan Powers?" He was addressing himself now to the alleged fugitive.

"I'm denying nothing." They were the first words she had uttered since the man Clyde appeared. She lifted her head defiantly, but there was a forlorn cadence as of hopelessness in her tone. "You seem competent, Mr. Officer, to do the talking. I'm surrendering—isn't that enough?"

"Almost but not quite," he answered. "Is this your car and your camping rig?"

"I brought them here."

"I'm afraid then you'll have to leave them here for the time being." In explanation he addressed now the rapt half-moon of auditors. "Taking her back with me, I'll have to use my own car. That means I'll have to leave this outfit behind temporarily and come in or send in for it later. I've got a spare man above here at the Mallard's Nest—I can send him tonight or tomorrow." He picked out Starr's figure from the crescent. "They told me there was one man staying here regularly. I take it you're the one?"

Mr. Starr, being for the moment practically speechless, so indicated by a dazed nod.

"Then I'll ask you as a favor to me—it'll also be a favor to this young woman—to take charge of her property until somebody comes to move it away. If you'll be responsible for it during the next few hours I'll very gladly be responsible for you. . . . Thanks." He full-faced the girl again. "Are you armed?"

She shook her head.

"All right, I take your word for it. I'm not going to put you to the indignity of searching you. There's something else I may have to do, I'm afraid, but not

that. You'd better put on your coat—if you have one handy. It'll be cool, riding. And I'd suggest that you pack up some toilet articles in a handbag or a bundle."

"If you'll let me go into my tent I'll be ready in a minute or two," she told him.

"Go ahead."

She entered the tent, drawing the door flap behind her. Almost immediately she was out again wearing a smart brown Norfolk jacket and adjusting a small canvas knapsack over her shoulder.

"Anything else?" she asked her captor.

"Yes, one other thing. Until I deliver you over to the proper authorities will you give me your promise not to try to escape?"

"I will not. I reserve the right of getting away—if I can."

"I'm sorry. You're making this thing harder on me and harder on you, too. But I can't afford to take any risks." Out of his pocket, she flinching a little at the sight of them, he fetched a pair of steel handcuffs that glinted gaily in the sunshine, and went up to her. Still flinching, his prisoner made an involuntary motion as though to put her arms behind her; then, recovering herself, she stood braced but passive and unresisting for what would follow.

"Say, mister," began Mr. Pelky gallantly, "do you

think that's necessary—her being just a poor lone woman—her merely a mere girl, as you might say, and you a—”

“Caspar Pelky, you shut up your mouth,” commanded Mrs. Pelky in a harsh hissing undertone but with a militant snap to the words. “You and your ‘merelies’!”

“I do think it's necessary,” vouchsafed Clyde apologetically. “I'll have to give my attention to driving that car of mine—I can't be watching her and watch the road at the same time.” Already he had fitted the notched jaw of one cuff over the girl's right wrist and pressed it snugly with a series of little clicking sounds, into place. He locked the mated cuff on her other wrist; the fastening mechanism clicked again. “Besides, you all heard what she just said about giving me the slip if she got a chance.”

He stepped back with the air of one who has completed a not entirely pleasant task. The girl drooped for a moment, her downcast eyes on the short, bright couplings that caught her hands in such close grips. It was only for a moment, though. She straightened up and tossed her head and smiled a tremulous wry little smile upon him and the assembled company.

“Come on, please—I guess there's nothing more,” said Clyde, and obediently she fell into step with him. Side by side they climbed the gentle ascent from the

lake shore. With a hand at her elbow he helped her into the two-seater, got in himself, turned the car about and up-hill, waving a farewell to the spectators, who solemnly and silently, like so many pallbearers, had trailed the pair up the slope. The car shot away—and the morbid spell was lifted and from all those left behind there issued forth excited language.

“Well,” exclaimed Mr. Starr, “I’ve been spending five to six months every year for going on nine years on this lake, but all the time I been here I’ll take my oath on a stack of Bibles that I ain’t never seen the beat of that. Nor nowhere else, neither, for that matter—never!”

“I don’t believe she’s done nothin’ out of the way—that nice-talkin’, good-lookin’ little trick,” proclaimed Mr. Pelky stoutly.

“You wouldn’t! I do!” countered Mrs. Pelky. She bridled and swelled out. Sufficient has been said about man’s inhumanity to man but not enough about woman’s inhumanity to woman’s own sex.

“But shackling her up that-a-way like as if she was a wild animal or somethin’!” protested Mr. Pelky, in a more subdued register however. “She ain’t no murderer.”

“She ought to be chained up,” said his wife. “I wouldn’t put murder past her—the flip piece!”

(If you are a woman, a pretty woman let us say,

and should ever be placed on trial upon a serious charge, such as manslaughter or bigamy—but especially bigamy—try to avoid having any woman of like age or thereabouts on the jury. Speak to your lawyer about it beforehand.)

“Say, one funny thing!” said Mr. Starr. “Did you notice how them two seemed to favor one another somehow—like as if they might be cousins or something?”

“They did not!” contradicted Mrs. Pelky. “Didn’t I get as good a look at ’em both as anybody did? He was a real nice pleasant-talking young fellow and everything he said and did he showed how it went against the grain with him to have to do his sworn duty. While she—well, if ever I saw a conniving, designing, hardened female desperado in tight-legged knee-pants—”

“Now, Millie, hold on!” begged Mr. Pelky, mildly and blunderingly aligned on the side of the defense. “Ain’t you being too hard—”

“Will you shut up? Can’t I get a word in edgewise with you two men standing here bragging about what you say you saw and what you think you thought? Ain’t a decent woman’s judgment about another woman—one that’s got her character wrote right out on her face—ain’t her judgment better than any man’s is? I’ll say it is. I’ll tell the world—”

Shrill trebles of alarm from Caspar Junior—he, regarding the subject under discussion as being exhausted, had but a moment before withdrawn to the dock—and the necessity of saving little John J. Pershing Pelky, who, having at last achieved his infantile ambition of falling overboard, was now engaged in drowning in a quiet and gentlemanly manner, prevented Mrs. Pelky from finishing her sentence. It was later, when the rescue had been accomplished and comparative calm had been restored, that she finished it with elaborations.

XI

Boone Ransom Is Puzzled

WHERE Boone Ransom lay on his face upon the lip of a shelflike projection a third of the way up the bold eastern face of Shivery Peak, he had command, through strong field-glasses, of a tally of sweeping miles. To himself he called this vantage his sentry-box, which precisely was what it was. Here, except by an occasional eagle quartering and requartering the zenith like an aerial beagle, he was unseen; and from here he could see much. The warm soft sunshine was very soothing to his back-muscles as he stretched at ease there among the mosses and ferns and wild grasses of the brink, with the midges and the deer-flies circling about his lazy head.

Behind him, straight almost, seemingly, as a church steeple, rose the uppermost part of the peak, very seamy and scarred and most forbidding, circumscribing his prospect in that direction. From this station there was visible no suggestion of a pathway mounting that gaunt belfry; only farther down, five hundred feet or so below the brim of the lookout, and

once again at a still lower level did the trail show itself as a frayed thread twisted in and out among the spiny lodge-pole pines and the undergrowth.

Almost beneath but slightly on his right, the triangular heaped-up declivities of the rock wall dipped out and beyond into the desert, which by reason of distance became a gentle gray-toned sea, all its swales and hummocks smoothed down into soft swells and rounded waves; and the separate clots of sage-brush merging together like seaweed strewn broadcast over those stilled rollers. Farther onward, the plain seemed quite flat. Just where it met the horizon a dim mirage flickered and faded.

To the left, by crooking his neck, he could peer straight down into the Mallard's Nest. Except when he used the glasses on it, the semblance it had was that of a greenish precipitate caught at the bottom of a deep churn—a churn that was broken down flat on one side, the side farthest from him, to make a ragged orifice through which the green sediment leaked out and oozed away in a thinning stream. But when he focused the lenses the squat dotting houses in the cove took on definite form, and the windmill behind his kinsman's store ceased to be a tiny many-winged gadfly and turned, indubitably, into a windmill; and the figures of humans plainly were distinguishable—in some familiar instances might even be identified.

For a farther backing to the cove was the great lava bed, spraddling off interminably. Viewed from this elevation, the beginnings of it assumed the aspect of an abundantly serrated maple leaf, but as intervening space wiped out the picture its continuing indents vanished into the September haze.

When the lone spy looked straight downward he was cognizant of what one traveling upon the surface might not notice, and this was that the exit from the gap in its broadest part lying immediately below his outpost had rather the shape of a Scotch bagpipe, swelling out amidships and then narrowing into a long twisted mouthpiece; and the nipple for the mouthpiece was the place where the rock and the lava nearly met, but the cove itself was a round green button under the belly of the bagpipe—its tasseled umbilical.

The one road escaping through the funneling gore ran with the bulge of the valley and skirted close up to the pediments of the guardian peak whereon for four days now he had abode; so that, measured by straightaways, the mileage from the Mallard's Nest to the outlet was less than half the mileage going by road, say two miles as against four and a half or five.

Ransom had been on his present perch since soon after sunrise. It was where he spent a majority of his waking hours inasmuch as nothing which went on at the base could escape detection, provided he re-

mained stedfastly vigilant. About noon he had his glasses trained on a certain spot in the mid-orbit of vision. He idly was studying a party of jack-rabbits at one of their fantastic minuets—their mating dance, the naturalists call this, since it is by the abandon of flopping ears and the exercising of sleigh-runner hind legs that the male of the species expresses his amorous yearnings for his mates. And his lady-loves, of which there may be several, reply in kind. There is a grotesque sentiment in it but, excepting for the confirmed faunalist, no real beauty. The rabbits he was eyeing hopped like fleas; to him they seemed just about the size of fleas.

He wearied of this distraction and, shifting for a perfunctory survey, was aware of a car entering the neck off yonder. At first it appeared no larger than a bug and, like a bug crawling along a distorted gourd-handle, it followed the mild rise of the curving road in and gradually up-grade toward the rough base of this massy watch-tower of his. Drawing nearer, it enlarged. Presently it was revealed to him that this car contained two occupants. He thought he knew that car. Something about its color or its contour, or about both, registered upon a tentacle of his memory. A minute or two passed and he almost but not quite was sure he knew it.

While he debated with himself whether he did or

did not, it came onward, winding inward against the nearer breadth of the amphitheater, until it almost directly was beneath him. Now it was getting into difficulties; easily enough he could discern that. The car was losing its fluid rhythm. It slowed, jerked forward, balked again, progressed jerkily for a hundred yards or so, then stopped short. It must be engine trouble that ailed it. He wriggled forward on his elbows, pointed his spy-glasses downward.

Engine trouble surely, and enhanced no doubt by the misbehavior of a self-starter which refused to live up to the implied promise of its first name. That added complication was also to be deduced. Indeed, and immediately, proof of the fact was presented.

From behind the steering-wheel he saw the figure of the driver wriggle out, a pigmy figure still, but magnified for him to the dimensions of a sizable doll. The dismounted one bent at the bow of the stalled car, evidently to twirl the auxiliary crank. What happened after that Ransom could not make out but he might guess. For the operator suddenly flattened down on the earth between the front axles, wriggling and struggling in a fashion which bespoke pain.

On that, the remaining manikin left its seat with a bound. A slenderer and smaller and patently a more agile shape than the other, it cleared the side of the car, alighting upon its feet. But instead of run-

ning to the assistance of the writhing figure on the ground, the second traveler ran for an opposite quarter altogether—ran with speed and intent diagonally across the hummocky footing toward the shielding verdure some ninety yards distant where the jack-pines marked those precipitous skirtings along the foot of Shivery Peak.

The runaway—a boy, it must be, so Boone Ransom decided from his glancing scrutiny of the leaping midget—had sped almost to the barrier of evergreens, when the victim of the accident rolled clear of the car, balanced himself upright on his knees and got a revolver out and began shooting. It was to be seen, though, that he fired with his left hand, and either purposely he fired high or else, being right-handed, his handling of the weapon was defective. Or then again, as Ransom all in an instantaneous flash reasoned it out, he might naturally be a poor shot. He fired five times in all, the sounds of the shots coming up in flat diminutive reports to Ransom's ears, and at each time of the five he apparently missed his mark. Certainly the fugitive neither faltered nor staggered, did not even dodge or duck, but darted headlong on for shelter.

The swift little drama of these two marionettes—one in flight, the other, hampered by an injury, striving to stop that flight—was over and done with in half a

minute or less. The stripling had whisked out of sight, seemingly having taken no hurt from the pursuing bullets, and the remaining actor on that wide stage laboriously was getting upon his feet and, nursing his right arm in his left, he was turning his back on the halted car and slowly making off afoot toward the Mallard's Nest—a trudge of at least two miles and a half over rocky going if he followed the bending road.

Thither he went, his movements outlined fairly enough by the powers of the one spectator's glasses where that absorbed spectator sprawled prone in the top gallery of the empty echoless playhouse. For a while Ransom merely sprawled and watched and watched him, waiting to see did he hesitate or offer to return to the scene of his late undoing.

This thing was interesting—tremendously interesting and significant. It called for investigation on the part of the solitary onlooker. But before that it called for caution and for precautions. A quarter of an hour passed, a half-hour, a full hour, while Boone Ransom stirred himself only to take a sandwich of bacon and bread from a small pouch hitched to his pistol belt and to munch it abstractedly.

The pedestrian, whoever he might be, had been swallowed up behind intervening buildings in the cove when finally Ransom got upon his feet. He

slipped his glasses into a case which swung on a strap at his flank, and slid a rifle into the crook of one arm—the rifle had been lying all this while beside him—and, retreating to the eastern verge of the shelf, nimbly disappeared down a sort of rocky staircase of Nature's making which descended steeply into the growths masking the lower portions of the mountain.

XII

A Girl with Chained Hands

FOR more than two hours Boone Ransom had been engaged in a series of devious maneuvers. First he went down by a familiar private way of which only he and one other had knowledge. That was the easiest and the swiftest part of the journey. The nature of the footing considered, he moved with almost a reckless speed. It was after he came abreast of the profiled rock wall that his gait slowed, that his advance began to be governed by seemingly aimless incursions among the twisted jungles of the undergrowth.

He would tack away from the dim path, right or left, and harrier-like would deploy into coverts where sometimes he must force a passage between the intricate trunks of lodge-poles, sometimes worm a weaving course in dense tangles of aspens and ferns and scrubby manzanita. If one of these detours took him into a rank of the heavier timber, here he must scale enormous boulders or, what was yet more difficult, penetrate where the bare limbs of fallen trees, one dropping across another during some ancient

windfall, had woven themselves into obstacles that inevitably would have baffled or at least retarded a less experienced woodsman.

Somehow or other, though, he would find a rift through which he might wriggle a sinewy body. He made surprisingly little noise. Generally he progressed almost without sound except for the soft crunching of his feet or the brushing of his shoulders against a slender bole or, once in so often, the snap and rustle of a brittle twig.

There was a method in his campaign, although it would have taken the eye of a practiced stalker to discern it. Each time the scope of his finished swing would bring him winding back again to the dorsal fin of a certain narrow ridge down which his hidden, almost invisible path meandered; and next time he would include a rude semicircle of territory lying beneath the one just traversed, so that a tracing of these questings would have shown a succession of irregular scallops like the scales of a fish, joined and slightly overlapping.

The care he took was all the greater the farther he went. At length, when he had neared the sills of the peak, buried as they were in greenery, and was concluding a loop which carried him almost but not quite out to the comparatively clear spaces, the searcher came upon signs to show him his labor might shortly

be rewarded. On a patch of moss he found a fresh boot-print—a surprisingly small boot-print it was—and then another and a third and many more, all wavering off in the same direction.

These tracks he followed, losing them frequently on stony outcrops or in the underbrush but picking them up again in bits of turf. The soil, such soil as he encountered, still was moist and soft from the downpours of the night before, so that his task grew easier for him as he traveled forward at a crouch, one hand holding his rifle, the other before him to fend off the switching boughs of saplings. Presently he checked and dropped and crawled into a patch of whippy willow-stuff, which separated, then instantly closed behind him. On all fours he crept with infinite slowness and in silence across this barrier until, himself well and safely in ambush, he could peer out upon what lay immediately beyond, within the marginal rings of the osiers that covered him.

What lay there was a little round pool, fed by a spring that gurgled from a cleft beneath a licheny, plump boulder and in its turn feeding a diminutive runlet which at once, like a shy thing, lost itself in another crevice underground. On this boulder perched a human figure, its back turned to Ransom, the feet almost in the water, the head sunken, the shoulders slumped as though drawn down by weariness or by

depression or perhaps by both. It was a boyish figure—and slight even for a boy's figure; he saw that in the first glance, but was not surprised. He had expected just that. Unless his glasses had lied to him, this figure should be slight and boyish.

From behind, not thirty feet away, he watched the drooping, quiet shape—watched it for a long half-minute. Then it stirred a little and straightened, so that gradually the side face and more of the torso were offered to his view. In the same shift the head turned and was lifted to show him thick curly cropped hair beneath the tilted hat-brim, a rounded, small neck above an unbuttoned collar and a cheek smooth enough for a woman's cheek.

By everything marvelous, it was a woman! That to him, was the crowning wonder of this adventure. The swell of the bust beneath the breast of the khaki shirt, the narrowing in at the waist-line, the broadening out at the hips!—why hadn't he read the riddle at first look?

In the same crowded instant of comprehension a yet greater wonder revealed itself. The trespasser there by the spring stood up and now he knew an added reason for those bent shoulders of hers. This young woman's hands were in limbo. A steel bond was on each of her wrists and between the wrists the bright glinting of a short steel chain.

His succeeding impulse—to rise and confront her—he restrained. He must make sure she was alone. A million to one, she was alone; but even so, that millionth chance he must not risk. So he bided, spying on her, his brain throbbing to the mystery of such an invader abroad here below the foundations of his stronghold—and gyved besides.

Immediately she did a thing characteristically feminine. With a gracefulness, which the enforced companionship of her forearms could not altogether destroy, she undid the buckled flap of a small canvas carryall swinging at her side and brought forth a silk bandanna and a small comb. She stooped and dipped the handkerchief in the water and with it she laved her face and dabbed her throat. This accomplished, she wrung out the handkerchief and spread it on the rock beside her, and next, pulling off her hat and using the pool as a mirror, she ran the comb through her brown mop. To his ears as she combed away came a brisk little clinking and rattling—a musical but grim accompaniment to the undertaking.

He was satisfied now, quite satisfied. Still he waited on until the comb had been restored to the wallet, waited until the stranger, after some moments of apparent irresolution, erected again to her full height and stood for a brief space as though listening and considering. She made him think of a young deer,

what with her brownish garb and her firm slim limbs and the intent poise of the bared head, just as a minute before while she mopped at her face he had said to himself she suggested a squirrel—those brisk, decisive movements of the joined hands, that half-crouch of the supple, compact body. Anyhow, she was like some wild thing, some dryad or nymph, fettered, but no longer resisting its fetters. But what else was she like? Something, somebody—but what, who?

He had it. For now, slowly pivoting more nearly toward him, she brought her face about so that for the first time he might study its oval, and in that flash he remembered where he had seen it, or at least its printed counterfeit—only last night, gazing out with placid, unafraid eyes from a wrinkled scrap of ugly cardboard with four ugly words—**FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD**—above the likeness. They still were unafraid, those black-lashed gray eyes of hers, which swept above and past him, never dropping down where he lay flattened and taut in his hiding place, but troubled, he thought, and very regretful.

So, with that, up he got and as he rose directly before her the eyes widened and the chained hands were clenched and went up, very womanlike, to be pressed against her bosom, and until she had backed against a rocky cupped formation which enclosed the glade at its farther side, and was halted by it, she

retreated from him, step by step slowly, her booted feet splashing in the shallow puddle. She seemed so helpless—so like some trapped and harassed creature.

But she rallied bravely enough and quickly, too, from this sudden shock for her nerves. In another second or so her confusion had passed, she making a little gesture as though to wipe it completely away. As he approached she relaxed, and lowered her unclasping fists, and came forward and met him at her boulder.

“Good morning,” she said quite calmly. “Or should it be good afternoon?” There was a trace—but no more than a trace—of diffidence in her bearing.

“Good day to you,” he said, and waited as though expecting explanations to come from her.

“I presume you’ve been hunting for me,” she said. She might have been addressing a casual and presumably friendly passer-by.

“I have.” He liked her voice. It was clear and strong with a little musical burr in it.

“Well, you’ve won,” she told him. “You know, of course, who I am then?”

“I think I can guess,” he answered.

“No need to guess. I’m Joan Powers—the one you’ve been looking for. I give up; that’s all I can do. It was foolish of me to try to get away; these—these things on my wrists and I knowing nothing of

the country. But it gives you such a terribly desperate sensation—being handcuffed does.”

“So I’ve heard,” he said.

“I suppose you might get used to them in time—I don’t know. You see, it’s my first experience. I’ve never been handcuffed before. Will you believe that?”

“I believe whatever you say,” he replied gravely. His manner changed; his voice deepened with feeling. Harshly he thrust forth his next sentence as a sort of sharp flaring demand. It was the only question he thus far had asked.

“What sort of a silly brute was it that would fasten those infernal things on a girl?”

“I wouldn’t exactly call him a brute,” she said. “He was kind enough according to his lights, I should say. He gave me my choice, too—offered not to do this to me if I promised not to try to escape. And I declined. So you see he wasn’t silly either. Because when the chance came I did try to escape. I didn’t stop to think how hopeless it was. I just acted on a blind impulse. He’d been hurt—his arm was sprained, I think.”

“Yes, I know about that,” said Ransom; “about his being crippled, I mean. I saw it.”

“You saw it?” Her eyebrows went up in arches of surprise. “Why, where were you?”

"Where I could witness everything that took place—but from a distance. Part of what happened when you two parted company I could make out; the rest of it I could figure out for myself without being told."

"Then you know how I ran?" she said, with the beginnings of a rueful smile. "And how he emptied his pistol after me when he saw me getting away?"

He nodded.

"But I'm sure he didn't mean to hit me. He only meant to frighten me—to make me stop."

"And were you frightened?"

"Well, I kept on running. And I got into those woods just below here and tried to find my way up the mountain. I didn't know what I would do afterwards if I did find the way up—but I kept going. I suppose it was instinctive—the desire to get away and to hide. And then, after a little while I got lost and I wandered about for a long, long time—at least it seemed a long time. It's lucky you found me when you did—that is, if you expect to share in the reward—because when you came through those bushes behind you I was just deciding to work back again, if I could, to the road and go and surrender myself. I'd had time to think—to realize how helpless I am in this plight." With her linked hands she motioned appealingly. "I suppose the officer—this man Julian Clyde—I suppose he sent you?"

"No, as it happens, I'm operating independently," he said. "I'm not having any dealings with that Julian Clyde person just yet."

"I'm ready to go whenever you are," she went on submissively. "All I have to do is to gather up my belongings."

He waited, saying nothing, while she shook out the handkerchief and stowed it in her pouch and covered her head with the slouch hat.

"Hold on, please," he said then. "It strikes me that the most important thing just now is to rid you of those things on your wrists."

"Haven't I tried and tried, though! See how I've bruised the flesh trying to pull them off. And I've made my fingers all sore, too, tugging and twisting at them. But it's no use."

"Suppose you let me look," he suggested.

She yielded him her hands but cried out sharply as his grasp on the steel circlets tightened.

"Be careful," she warned, and he released her. "Don't press them in too hard. You can't possibly loosen them without the key. Already I've found out that much. And if you squeeze them you'll only force them tighter—see those little notches there like teeth? They pinch closely enough as it is; not painful but—well, pretty snug-fitting."

"A cold-chisel, or a file, now," he said, his brows

in a frown. "Either one would do the trick. Or an ax to chop the chain in two with."

"If I could dip my hands in something oily or greasy I think perhaps I could slip them off myself," she amended. "Even soapsuds might do. I thought of soap and looked for some but I'd forgotten to put any in my kit-bag. I packed in rather a hurry. It was my first experience at being arrested and perhaps I was flurried." She smiled up at him—a little embarrassed smile, without affectation in it or guile either, he decided.

"I know where there's soap—and lard, too," he said. "And I could get a file, but that would take time."

"Why bother?" she said. "That policeman or detective or whatever he is would only insist on putting them back on me. In view of what occurred he might even want to hobble my feet as well."

"I don't think he would," said Ransom slowly. "Somebody else might have something to say about that." Then after a moment: "Are you hungry? You must be."

"A little bit," she confessed. "It hadn't occurred to me before that I might be getting hungry but since you mention it—"

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. "I had a cold snack but I ate it. But I can take you to where there's food."

It's going to be a pretty hard trip for you, though, hampered like that—hard and rough, too.

"There'll be places, I expect, where you'll have to hold on to my belt. I'll take the lead and you follow, please." About his tone and manner there was no suggestion of the warden addressing a recaptured charge but only a solicitous courtesy, as though they stood not in the relation of keeper to newly taken prisoner but rather that of a volunteer wishful to serve a young woman temporarily in serious difficulties.

"I'll promise to keep up with you," she said. "I wouldn't dare fall behind. Before you came these woods were beginning to make me afraid; just here they're so thick and so dark."

With no more said he trampled through the reeds, she close behind him as he broke the way for her, and they swung up-hill together, the courier with his rifle at the carry, the girl with her pinioned hands clasped and lifted in front of her.

She noted now the quality of his hair—crinkly and thick and of a warm auburn color, almost a red. She already had noted that his eyes were brown with flecks of a smoldering heat in them like bits of hot bronze. She saw how under his shirt the muscles of his back flexed and tautened.

XIII

One Refugee Joins Another

PRESENTLY as these two went along, the girl gave a little exclamation and stopped short.

"I must have been turned around sure enough," she said. "We're climbing steadily and I was certain the nearest route to the road would practically be all down-hill."

"It would be if we were heading out to the road," he told her, and turned about on his heels.

"Why, where are we headed for, then, if not for the road?"

"For near the top of this peak, if you're willing."

"What difference would it make if I weren't willing?" She shrugged her shoulders.

"All the difference in the world," he answered gravely. "You don't have to go with me unless you wish to. You're a free agent."

"I a free agent—and wearing these ornaments?" she asked incredulously. "Didn't you come to seek me out and to catch me?"

"I came to seek you, not knowing you were a woman

in distress but to find out, if I could, what business sent you. As for catching you—well, I don't like that word 'catch.' Please don't use it again. And please believe me when I tell you that my purpose is to aid you if I possibly can, not to make things harder for you than they already must be."

"Still I'm afraid I don't quite understand," she pressed. "I appreciate your kindness and your thoughtfulness that you've shown; but after all what's the answer to your ferreting me out unless it means you're going to feed me first and get my hands freed, if you can, and then turn me over to the men—or rather, the man—I got away from this morning? Sympathy is one thing, of course, but a man's self-interest is another, isn't it, now?"

"I'm sorry that self-interest of a sort has to enter into the situation," he said. "Unfortunately it does. I do have to think of myself. It's a duty I owe to myself—and perhaps to certain others as well. Otherwise I'd not be dragging you up this steep mountain. I'd be—well, I don't know exactly what I would be doing to get you out of this mess without delay—but at any rate, I'd be trying my level best."

"You really mean that—when you know there's a reward on my head? I believe that's the phrase they use. It makes me feel so important, as if my head had suddenly acquired a value it never had before."

"Don't joke about it."

"I'm not really joking. I'm only puzzled, that's all. You tell me one thing and yet we seem to be engaged on a thing that's exactly the opposite, and naturally—"

He broke in on her.

"Listen," he said. "Before we go any further I'll have to be frank with you. Then it's for you to decide your own course. My name is Boone Ransom. Did you ever hear that name before? Does it mean anything to you?"

"Oh!" she cried, enlightened. "Of course I've heard it before. Even as a newcomer hurrying through this district I was bound to hear it, what with everybody telling about you. You're the man who—" She hesitated.

"Go on, finish the sentence," he bade her. "I'm the man who held up a passenger train last Sunday and got away with the swag—the man they're all hoping, down below yonder, to nab. In a way of speaking, we're in the same boat, Miss Powers, you and I—there's a price on my head, too. Now then, are things beginning to be clearer to you?"

"Surely," she affirmed. "But even so, why should you jeopardize yourself on my account?"

"You give me too much credit. I'm not jeopardizing myself. I'm still protecting myself to the best of my ability—you should have seen how carefully

I went about the job of skirmishing for your whereabouts. My object at the beginning was to learn what you were doing poaching on my reservation. There's another object now—it was forced on me. Not that it's altogether unwelcome; I won't say that. But helping you—if I do succeed in helping you, with all the difficulties that there are in the way—won't add any to my present risks. Is that plain? If it isn't, I'll be able to make my meaning plainer after we've climbed another thousand feet or so."

She eyed him steadily and searchingly as she made her response:

"By hearsay, Boone Ransom, I've learned something about you. If it's any comfort to you, they give you the name—even your enemies who're trying to snare you—of being a gentleman, of being honorable—yes, of being chivalrous. By all accounts, any woman could trust herself to you and not suffer by it. And when I look at you and when you speak, I'm certain that they weren't wrong in their estimate—that I can trust you. Besides, as you say, we've something in common—a very big something. We're both fugitives; both of us outside the law. And that should make a further bond between us, if anything can. Is that enough for me to say?"

"Thank you," he said, as though dismissing this phase of the subject. "But before you finally decide

—and, understand, you must be the one to decide, not I—suppose we hike on a piece farther. This particular spot—so near to the flats—isn't quite as safe for us as it might be. I'll feel easier in my own mind when we're higher up where we can watch and talk at the same time."

"Yours to command." She said it gallantly. "Let's go, buddy!"

He grinned at that—a winning grin by which two even rows of strong white teeth were shown.

"You must have been overseas," he said.

"No, but I served in the Junior Red Cross, on this side. And you?"

"The Marines—that was my outfit. They got over—the Marines always do. We're both veterans, it seems."

"Still another reason, don't you think, why I might put my confidence in you?"

"Come along then," he commanded. "If you get winded or tired out make me check up. I can swing my arms and that helps, but you can't. You'll be terribly handicapped. I'll try to remember that and have some pity on you."

The girl in the handcuffs did get winded and tired too, but she neither lagged nor begged for a respite during the next half-hour. Once in a while, as he moved swiftly onward, with no hesitation tracing out

a passage so obscured that she, mounting alone, would have strayed from it within the first five minutes, he cast a look over his shoulder.

She, always two paces behind him, came stedfastly along, her lips parted, her eyes shining, her hair growing damper but losing little of its curl, her crossed hands pressed hard now against the heaving front of her blouse. She would smile back at him in plucky reassurance of her ability to follow where he might guide her—a twisted, panted, fleeting little smile but a confident one; and then he would shove on into bracken hip-deep and deeper, and over ledges like rounds in a very steep ladder, and go winding in and out among tree boles, now stooping where a fallen trunk bridged across the buried trail, now circling under a boulder as big as a bungalow.

She had no eyes nor any thoughts for the beauties through which they passed—the eery glens brooding in an everlasting green-gray duskiness; the dwarf manzanitas with their varnished leaves and their smooth, symmetrical reddish-brown trunks like the legs of Indian maidens; the gardens of red vine-maple and yellowed furze; the lesser defiles dropping abruptly away this side and that, from that riblike lateral—a long thin bone projecting out of the plated breast of the mountain—along which mainly they traveled. She scarcely was cognizant of squirrels

chippering or sullen porcupines scuttling slowly away from them or, once, of a startled blacktail deer bouncing off through the undergrowth. All her powers, bodily and mental, were concentrated upon the task of accompanying her escort.

Between the two there was no speech—breath for her was too precious a commodity to be squandered on words. Through perspiration which nearly blinded her, she set her desperate gaze fixedly upon a spot between his athletic shoulders and pushed doggedly on. Soon enough, from sheer fatigue she began to regard herself as an automaton, an insensate piece of mechanism rather than flesh and blood. Under her bonds the chafed skin was wringing wet. Light steel as they were, they weighed on her wrists heavy as so much lead. She could feel her exhausted legs trembling as she forced them to do the bidding of her will. It was sheer grit, that and nothing else, which carried her over the final tortuous stretch behind this strangely acquired escort of hers.

Eventually, when it seemed to her that her heart soon must burst from her throat, he came to a pause—how she rejoiced and gave inward thanks for that pause!—below a stone cross-ridge, which, so well as she might tell, impassably barred all further ascent. He waited here until her gasps had eased, she with her relaxing figure sagged beside the rocky face of the

transverse, and her face pressed against one sleeve of her jacket.

"One more effort and you'll be over the worst part," he told her. "Then you can really rest."

"Much obliged," she said chokily, her forehead still in the crook of an arm. "I'm almost ready. What's next, *mon capitaine*?"

"No hurry," he said. "I'm proud of you—you're as game as they make 'em." Little grateful puffs of coolness fell upon her neck and she knew that with his hat he was fanning her.

After a little while, when she looked up, he quit his fanning, and as he parted and drew aside a curtain of stunted piney growth and tall ferns, she saw how, behind this green paneling, a sort of natural stair-well went scrouging almost straight up a very narrow chimney-like cleft in the rocky buttress.

Placing her immediately behind him, he made her lay fast hold on his belt at the back, and next she was being half dragged, half lifted higher and higher, a scrambling foot or two at a time until, without ever exactly realizing how she got there or how long it took, she found herself with scraped elbows and tingling knees, lying on her side in a mattress of thick wild mosses. And now there was sunshine all about her, and in her nostrils draughts of a revivifying breeze.

That buoyant air was stimulant to her. Her lungs quit pumping so fiercely and her strength renewed itself in her frame. He aided her to her feet and, convoying her across a flat grassy shelf to its outer edge, showed a great distant panorama outspread beneath and on beyond.

"This is my sentry-post," he said, and brought out his field-glasses. "This is where nobody can see us except from an airplane, or reach us either—if he's hostile. When you've recovered from that last lap of our jaunt I'll show you the lay of the land."

XIV

Up the Rocky Road to Sanctuary

FIVE minutes later young Ransom, pointing a finger this way and that, was expounding the wide-spread topography below them, Joan sitting alongside with her legs crossed sailor-fashion, her elbows on her knees, the canted binoculars at her eyes.

"That gape off there where the lava and the rock seem almost to clench together like jaws, that's where you turned in this morning off the high prairie," he was saying. "Passing through there, but out of our view from up here, you probably saw two cars parked and some men—possibly two or three of them—loafing about?"

"I did," she agreed. "They saw us, too, I think, from a hundred yards away or so, but they didn't offer to stop us."

"It was likely they wouldn't, since you were coming on in. It's only when somebody goes out again that he's headed off—if he seems suspicious."

"Why, yes," she said, "that happened to me yesterday afternoon when I came by for the first time. You

see, this trip today was my second trip in. Yesterday I got off the road and blundered into this little shut-in place and after I had been set right by one of the natives—a gruff old man with matted eyebrows and long whiskers—I started out again, and then it was that two men who seemed to be on watch in that narrow gap lounged down from some rocks and looked me and my car over pretty closely. Who are they?”

“Deputies under the sheriff of the county—Jeff Rowley, a friend of mine. At least he was a friend up to about five days ago. Jeff’s main camp, though, where most of his posse stay since he split it up, is considerably closer in toward us and off in this direction. You needn’t try to locate it—it’s not in sight.

“And here, almost under us, that’s the spot where the car broke down, where you made your dash to get away from this man Clyde who had you in charge. It was from up on this bench that I saw the whole show—him getting lamed and you scooting away and the shooting and all.”

“Now I understand,” she said. “No wonder I didn’t suspect that anybody might be eavesdropping on me. And I suppose that your curiosity was aroused and you set out to investigate?”

“Yes, but not right away. I took my time about it. I had my reasons. Now swing your glasses a little farther to the left and you’ll see the Mallard’s Nest,

as it's called, where you dropped in yesterday. A good many of the people who live there are my own people—related to me, I mean, by blood or by marriage. And all of them are my well-wishers. I reckon Jeff looks on them as my accessories. . . . Now take a good look at that windmill behind the largest building.”

“I see it and remember it too—from yesterday. What of the windmill?”

“It's the real key to my security—and yours. You'll notice, if you focus closely enough, that in one of the wings there's a clipped place—a slice out of the under side where the blade is broadest.”

“I can just make it out—a three-cornered break.”

“Well, when the windmill is checked so that particular paddle is stationary at the angle in which it is now—pointing due south—it means there's been no change in conditions down below since last reports. But if the fan should start up—so many turns, so many checks, it's a signal device, a sort of dot-and-dash code. If the signals were being flashed at night there'd be a lighted lantern swinging on the dented blade—not that there's any real danger of a night attack. Once it gets dark, I quit looking for any possible danger.

“Now then, the man who operates the windmill for my benefit—our benefit, I should say, seeing that

you've joined forces with me—is my stepuncle, Anderson Cyphers, or 'Anse' for short—the same man that you talked with yesterday when you were asking directions. He married my father's widowed sister-in-law; she's dead now, which I reckon is just as well. He's not what I'd call an especially attractive type, but he's shrewd and he's dependable and he knows how to keep mum, being a close-mouthed party anyhow; and on top of all that, he believes it's to his own selfish interests to serve me. I slipped down and saw him a few minutes last night after the worst of the rain was over. He told me about his meeting with you and he showed me a printed notice with your picture on it."

"Oh!"

"Your officious acquaintance Clyde had given it to him after you were gone out of the Nest. That was how I recognized you so promptly when I took you by surprise today—from that half-tone."

"So that was the way of it?" His companion drew in her breath with a little sip of comprehension. "Perhaps I'd better supply the missing parts of my own story then—the parts you don't know yet. I camped for the night at the foot of Quartz Lake. This morning, just after I finished breakfast and was preparing to move, I was arrested by the zealous Mr. Clyde. He shamed me before a handful of staring,

inquisitive strangers—a woman and two men and some children. I shouldn't blame him though; he seemed really quite sorry for it all. Anyway, I don't feel the humiliation of it any more. Somehow, since you came, that's all passed. It's only the inconvenience of having my hands kept in such close communion that still bothers me. Never mind that.

"Well, to get along, he turned my car and camp equipment over to one of those other men for temporary storage and then he put me in his car and started back up-country, intending, so he told me, to stop by this way for a bite of lunch—not that I wanted any then—and then hurry along to the railroad and catch a train. I wasn't particularly edified over the outlook—you can guess that?—with nothing pleasanter for me to look forward to at the end of the trip than a cell in a jail. It's only by hearsay that I know about lock-ups, but from what I can gather, those who've been in them rarely feel merry and bright."

She valiantly was striving to make light of the recent ignominies. But the lilt of mischief in her voice apparently struck no responsive metal in this newly won partisan of hers. He glowered into space and, as though irritated, tugged fretfully at a tawny forelock. She went on:

"When we were getting close to the Mallard's Nest

his car balked and he got out to crank her—but from then on you know the sequel as well as I do, better in fact. What you don't know is that for two weeks I've been trying to elude arrest. I didn't try to disguise myself; I wasn't foolish enough to think that would be of any use. But I picked out stopping-points off the main beats and I—”

“Don't, please,” he said authoritatively. “I'm accused of committing a certain crime. You're accused of doing something else. I'll state right here that I don't care how much the circumstances may appear to be against you, I'm convinced of your innocence. All the same, there's a reward out for you, a bigger reward for me. Guilty or not guilty, you've practically put yourself at my mercy. Or maybe it would be nearer the truth to say that chance—let's call it chance—has thrown us together under curious conditions.”

“Curious and highly unconventional,” she supplemented.

“Granted. Such being the case, I move that during the entire time we spend together, whether it be for an hour or a day or longer, that we just concern ourselves with the present and the future—which will keep us pretty busy anyhow—and say nothing to each other about our troubles in the past. That might make it a bit easier for you—for both of us, I mean. Is it a bargain? Does it go?”

"Whatever you say," she assented, looking soberly up at him. "You're being very considerate of me, comrade."

"Anyway," he continued, "there are more pressing things to think about—contriving to get your hands free and to get to where food is. You must be almost famished by now; no meal at midday and then that hard climb just now with still another climb ahead of us—that is, provided you choose to tackle the second climb. Before you do choose, I'll tell you this: you don't have to go along with me any further. Three courses are still open to you."

"So many as that? What's the first?"

"I hate to state it. The first is that you abandon all hope of getting away, and after you're rested up, that you retrace the steps you've just taken—I'll steer you down to a certain point—and from there you can walk on out and give yourself up to the men you'll find camped in a designated place at the bottom of this mountain."

She shook her head in such emphatic dissent that her hair slapped her face.

"Bully!" he said heartily. "I'm glad you're against the proposition. I knew—I was sure—you had too much spirit, after having come thus far and being so sporty about it all, to turn quitter at this stage of the fight."

“Thanks for the compliment, but go on, please. And the second is—”

“Is this: between now and night I can pilot you down off this peak. There are two routes—the trail up which I just brought you, which is a secret trail that nobody else excepting one person knows anything about; and the regular trail—you can pick up two stretches of it below us by using those glasses. It’s the easier going, that trail is, but naturally I prefer the other one.

“By waiting, then, until after nightfall before we ventured out into the settlement, I could slip you past the sheriff’s inside camp and tuck you away in the house of almost any one of my women relatives. Certainly none of them would betray you—you could be might sure of that. Whatever else you can say for my breed, there are no traitors among them. They’d hide you as well as they could—but they couldn’t smuggle you out.

“You see, here’s the big difficulty: you’d still be between the two squads of Rowley’s force—one behind you back of the cove, the other in front of you. If you ever did succeed in getting past the men out at the mouth of the bore—though there’s not a chance in a hundred that you could; it would be a miracle—you’d be set afoot on that bleak desert, with no prospect of getting entirely away because by now Clyde

undoubtedly has spread the word of your escape from him, and the alarm has been raised for miles around, which means any number of people will be on the outlook for you.

“Even up here, safe as we may seem, we’ve got our problems. There are two entrances, so to speak, to this nice isolated little asylum of ours, but just at present it’s somewhat shy on outside exits. In fact, it hasn’t got any exit at all. Because, for at least two more reasons which you’ll understand if you decide to mount higher and see them for yourself, it’s humanly impossible to get down from the back side of this peak and on out into the range behind us. We’re in what the French call, I believe, a *cul-de-sac*. Not that I ever heard any of them using the term while I was in France. I must have read it in a book somewhere.”

She nodded. “It’s quite plain, as you explain it. What would you advise then?”

“I’ll not presume to advise. I’d rather state the third and last alternative. It’s for you to go on with me now to the very top. There’ll be a shelter for you—rather primitive but still a shelter, and there’ll be food there and a fire and a bed and a fair prospect of releasing you from those rotten shackles. And up above at our leisure—tonight or tomorrow or next day—we can map out ways and means; see if we

can't figure a way to deliver you out of this predicament, though I'll have to admit that so far I haven't been able to figure even the starting of one."

"But how about you?" she asked. "If your own plans should conflict, if my being with you should interfere with—" She checked and began anew: "I mean if my being with you is going to prove a burden and a handicap to you, why—"

"It won't," he assured her earnestly. "I expect to be staying on indefinitely. It's a sort of siege I'm standing and it's liable to last quite a spell." He cast off his gravity; a gleam of restrained merriment flashed in his eyes. "Jeff Rowley is too wise to undertake coming up after me but he thinks I'm treed, which in a manner of speaking I am. And so his notion, as I learn on pretty good authority, is to starve me out.

"His ace-card is that he has control of the mouth of the bag, where I can't get past unless I fight my way out. But mine is that I'm in no danger of starving, because while he's watching so cannily and so patiently at the foot of one trail, there's my own trail, as you know, which I travel practically at will. I can pack up fresh supplies for as many weeks or months as I need them. I'm afraid Jeff's in for a long and tolerably chilly stay in these parts. Still, Jeff always was an optimist." Again his care-free eyes were

twinkling. "Whether the hardy old scout will still be so optimistic once the snowdrifts begin to pile up around him is another matter."

He turned serious again.

"Miss Powers, there it is. I warn you now that if you go up this peak you'll be marooned there absolutely alone with me. But I promise you that for so long as you stay in my company you'll be safe—that you'll be treated as though you were my own sister."

"No need to promise. Didn't I tell you a little bit ago that I trusted you? I repeat it—I do trust you, Boone Ransom."

Her evident courage, her frank faith in him, her bearing, so wistful yet so buoyant and so confident, and she so disregardful of her bonds and her weariness—they made something throb and skip inside of him. What words were almost on his lips he repressed; what, resuming, he said was:

"I only wish I could give you some other assurance. If there was anything more I could offer—"

"There is!" The interruption was pitched in a whimsical key. "As a polite gentleman you might give me a cigarette. I'm perishing for one. And you've been smoking away these last five minutes or so absolutely regardless."

"Good Lord, yes!" It was an apologetic lament. His hand jumped to his breast pocket. . . . He lighted

a match, held it for her, looked down at her as contentedly she puffed and puffed again. Rather than encompassed conspirators they might at that moment have passed for a pair of well-set-up young hikers, amiably at ease on this mountainside. A chance observer, had there been one such straying to this lofty spot, might well and utterly have been deceived—until he saw that ominous telltale glint of her tether where it dangled, shining in the sunlight like a short, twisting length of woven silver between her wrists.

Her next speech showed a mounting disdain for such bothersome incumbrance. For, as he still was begging her pardon for the oversight, she overlapped his contrite words with her own:

“Next time perhaps you’ll recognize a modern young woman when you meet her unawares. Here’s the proof that I’m one of the species.” She made her ligatures dance and clink. “If you read up on the fashion notes you’d know the modern young woman is going in this season for slave bracelets. Seemingly your education has been neglected, Mr. Ransom.”

“I’ve recently been rather out of touch with the gay world,” he answered, taking pattern from her mood. He bethought him of a contingency until now forgotten.

“I’m sorry to disturb you when you’re looking so

comfortable," he told her, "but it's just occurred to me that you mustn't sit too long here. It might make you stiff and sore and there's another big pull up grade ahead of us."

"Right you are," she assented, casting away her cigarette. "Help me up, please."

He swung her to her feet and made ready. The strap of her little knapsack had no buckle on it; wherefore when he slipped it off her shoulder it still was looped fast on her arm. With his knife he cut the leather, telling her, as he knotted the severed ends to the cartridge-laden belt from which his holstered revolver swung, that he meant she should march as lightly burdened as possible. He put his glasses in their case, slid his rifle into the crotch of his left elbow until it balanced at poise, then faced her, making the military salute:

"All set, pardner?"

"All set, partner," she replied.

Simultaneously a joint realization of the distinction between their contrariwise pronunciation of the same familiar word and the opposing inflections they had employed, his being slow and drawly, hers concisely accented, made them both laugh. For a fact, the contrast had been so sharp.

"What part of the South did you hail from originally?" she asked.

"The mountain country, right on the border between Virginia and Kentucky. My father's farm straddled the line, part of it in one state, part in the other. You're no Westerner either, are you?"

"Not by nearly the width of the continent. Why, once upon a time I was a Yankee schoolmarm by profession. At seventeen I taught a district school in little old Rhode Island where I was born. That was six years ago before we"—she caught herself—"before I moved out here." As though to cover some slight slip of the tongue she quoted: "'For East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet—' "

"But slightly different, eh, when it's a case of East and South meeting in the West?" her conductor said over his shoulder, preceding her toward the break-away at the head of those rocky stair-steps in the inner northern corner of the "bench."

"We'll have to go down a little way before we start up," he explained, extending his free hand to aid her. "But from then on it'll be up, up, up. There's only one consolation—already we're above the danger-line and you won't have to hurry unless the sunset overtakes us—pardner!"

XV.

On Shivery Peak

AT the bottom of their spiraled niche he tarried long enough to roll a heavy rounded stone into a site ordained for it and to smooth away all marks of a split in the fronded draperies thereabouts, the net results being not only effectually to block and cover the egress from the cleft but to create the illusion that here the up-bound path ran like a snake under the rocks and abruptly ended. When he had strewed handfuls of dry pine needles about to hide the scours made by the shifted boulder, even one experienced in woodcraft might have been deceived by these artifices, simple as they were.

"I'll have to tow you again for a spell," he advised. "Catch on tight and cling fast."

She hooked her fingers on his belt and although limber, spiny withes chafed her face and lashed at her sides she managed not to release hold as he went scrourging and shoving through an amplitude of the lodge-poles, with his neck sunk between his shoulders until he looked deformed. There was a wisdom,

she quickly saw, in this shambling, hunchbacked posture and she imitated it. Five minutes of this, perhaps ten, she endured and then she found herself emerging where she might lift her head. Amazingly, they were back again on their lost trail, being now considerably above and overlooking the coign they just had quitted.

"Look behind you," he bade her, "and see if you can tell how we got here."

She looked and couldn't and owned to it.

"That's another little trick of mine," he boasted. "Whenever I do this—and that's twice a day regularly—I follow a different course through this bunch of jack-pines. It makes the traveling tougher but there's no beaten track left to show, which is the good thing about it."

Afterwards the most part of that final upward struggle was to abide in her brain as a sort of dream—mainly a bad dream. She did remember that almost entirely they moved in shadow, the shades thickening below them and the wind taking on added zest and coolness as they mounted; also, and with gratitude, she remembered the times when he let her stop for rest. Each of these times the temptation was strong within her plaintively to ask how much farther they must go, and each time, she inwardly giving herself credit for it, Joan forbore asking.

The high autumnal air, steadily growing more and more rarefied, made her light-headed. It made the blood throb in her temples, but if it did that it likewise had a balm and a vigor to it which exhilarated like draughts of some keen wine. After every halt she felt restored and uplifted, and ultimately the nightmarish sensation began to pass from her. She didn't know it but she was getting her second wind, and from now on, although her feet might drag and her knees often threaten to give under her, she paid more heed to her surroundings.

She was aware of their mountain dropping almost sheer beneath her. Where she toiled along, naked declivities of rock were appearing and upthrusts of glassy black obsidian, the latter to be skirted cautiously because of their treacherous slick sworls; but below, all was uniformly green, with the girdling pines sliding past endlessly in separate parallel tiers, as though they might have aisles concealed between them, and then farther on, as space merged them in, turning to widening billows and finally running together smoothly so that the lowermost slopes were cradled under one enormous, soft sage-green coverlet.

She was aware too, of constantly increasing patches of light shaly rubble, some of the fragments being in splintery triangles like the heads of darts, some in flat slabs like broken slate shingles, some rounded and

hollowed like half-made crocks flung aside by their maker as worthless. And seeing these last, she was reminded subconsciously of a poetic simile of faulty hollow ware beside the potter's door which she had read sometime. Was it old Omar who had said it? She couldn't recall the exact words, only the sense of them. These shards accumulated fast and her wearied feet stumbled and slipped among them. She must keep her mind on the task before her; to slide in one of these stone-yards might be a disastrous thing. She was limping now but strove to hide her lameness from Ransom whenever he glanced back encouragingly.

All at once and unexpectedly, as the two of them, going single file as usual, had edged past a sharply bending overhang where their path fitted into the spiral of the diminishing peak like threads cut in a screw, the slanted rays of the late sunlight shone with a great brilliancy on her face, dazzling her momentarily, and by that she realized that they must have reached the summit or at least must have attained to a height very near it. Close to physical collapse as she was, the girl could cry out in joy and very inspiration of the greater spectacle now all so suddenly revealed on the sky-line.

Just ahead of her was much serried rim-rock, gray and green and brown—monoliths of it, spires of it, spindles, parapets, needles, pedestals, minarets, monu-

ments—suggestive of a great snagged ring of gigantic gravestones encircling a burying-place of Cyclopean monsters; and on beyond, past a corner of these mad formations she saw the sun, he being a blowzy, hot, untidy giant of a sun, who was snuggling down among far-away mountains which had lost their separate outlines and become a vast nest of rumped bedclothes, in color purple, as becoming for the couch of a king. But the nearer mountains lifted themselves up clear and defined, an endless, countless royal battalion of them, their shoulders stippled with red and foiled with silver as the angled rays lay on them fleetingly; and many were bareheaded, with wrinkled gray polls reared above their evergreen collars where the timber left off, but a few, towering higher, wore mitres of pure snow—regal ermine for monarchs at rest.

As for the westward heaven, that was a splendor unutterable and transcendent, an horizoned glory shot crosswise and lengthwise with bandings of pink and blue and green and lavender; with Jacob's ladders of radiance sweeping upward toward the zenith through banked levels of luminous cloud-drift; with spokes of fine gold radiating from the unseen hubs of celestial wheels; with shimmer, shifting, dissolving gentler hues and lesser shadings of yet more gentle hues filling to the full all farther parts of the firmament—and the evening star just coming out, a dainty herald.

But this was not a special production. Among the Cascades Nature frequently achieves such effects in her sunsets.

Before that loveliness Joan blinked and gasped—a gasp part pleasure, part pain. She strove to go forward, then staggered and crumpled down in a small disconsolate heap among the potsherds.

Turning, he saw this and he ran back and knelt alongside her with solicitude in his face, and remorsefully he began saying something about having pushed her too hard.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “but I really am afraid I’ve played out temporarily. And then that beauty—oh, it struck me like a blow! Just let me lie here a little while.”

“No need of that,” he said comfortingly. “Why, we’re practically home. There’s the corral entrance to Fort Defiance right yonder.”

With a final effort the spent girl lifted her head and looked where he pointed and saw, not more than fifty yards distant, a crevice in the rim-rock through which a natural scarp of smooth obsidian protruded like a polished tongue lolling out from a pair of most formidable jaws.

Then she felt herself being heaved up and crushed in a very strong embrace, and as she was pressed against his chest she became limp. A dizziness and

swimming of exhaustion came over her. Joan shut her eyes and let herself relax. Vaguely she knew she was being borne along like a child within two stout arms. She could feel his heart beating, could after a dim and distant fashion hear his boot-calks scraping on the hard surface of the short, steeply inclined glacis as he passed between the jowls of it, and the next thing definitely she knew she was being lowered into a nest of something soft and woolly which warmly covered her to the chin.

She got her eyes open. She was lying upon a bunk with blankets over her and under her. Beneath the lower blanket there must be evergreens; she felt them yield to the pressure of her weight and caught faintly their balsamy smell. Above her was a slanted low roof with undressed sticks for rafters and a wattling of small limbs and pine boughs interwoven snugly; in the deepening semigloom she could make out that much. About her were walls, and there was a door and a very small window like a port-hole. Ransom was not there. No matter; she wanted only to be left alone, to be let go to sleep. She wanted to sleep the clock around. She had a wan conviction that, left undisturbed, she could sleep for a week.

Almost immediately though he was back bringing cold water in a tin cup and was propping her up gently while she, holding the cup in both her leashed hands,

with greedy gulps emptied it. The draught benefited her; she rallied slightly.

"Let me get your boots off," she heard him saying next, as from a long way off; and with that he was unlacing them. As he drew them off, blisters burned like little fiery specks on the soles of her stockinged feet. She didn't care about blisters now.

"Lie still," he bade her. "I've got a fire going outside. Inside of five minutes I'll have hot coffee for you and something to eat."

"Thanks," she murmured drowsily, and dozed off.

Later—a long while later, so it seemed to her—he was rousing her to drink strong, bitter coffee, was making her sup heated soup from a tin, was offering her slices of somewhat scorched toast upon a tin plate. The coffee and the soup she drank; the toast she waved away. Her appetite, which all afternoon had gnawed at her, was gone.

"And now let's see about those handcuffs," he said. "I've been worrying about them all along."

"Never mind," she answered. "I'm used to them. Let me wear them tonight. Tomorrow—tomor—" Her voice trailed off.

"As you say," he agreed. He bent over her.

"Listen, please," he said. "The window behind you is too small for anybody to get in by. And the door of this shack is strong—it was made strong for

a purpose. Prop it shut on the inside and nobody can get in—understand me, nobody. I'm going to leave you now. I'll bed down for the night just outside; if you should want anything call—I'll hear you, if you'll just call loud enough. As soon as I'm outside, if you'll get up for long enough to drop the wooden crossbeam in the two slots on the jambs you needn't worry after that about anything. You can lie down again and be absolutely safe, absolutely secure."

"I hear you," she said so drowsily that her words were almost inaudible. He passed out; the heavy door of split logs was slammed shut behind him.

An hour later, coming on tiptoe from his bivouac, young Ransom tried the door. It gave to his touch on the ax-hewn wooden latch. Either she had been too tired to rise after his departure or there was another reason why she had not set the brace in its sockets—a reason based on her confidence in him. Whatever the cause might be, he felt a curious little thickening in his throat as though a lump were forming there.

He pushed the door in, inch by inch, until the gap would admit his head. He could catch the sound of breathing—soft untroubled breathing; could make out in the gloom the huddle of her still body beneath the coverlets.

He closed the door very softly.

XVI

Morning and with It Freedom

ITS composition changing, day began as a matter of jades—which in the vault above deepened to purplish-black—and of ambers, but they would turn a flaming orange as the sun came booming up. It was all still dark, though, except for one pale saffron slit in the east, like a lid half-cocked on a jaundiced eyeball, when young Ransom moved where he had slept on a mattress of boughs, feet first to the dying coals of his camp-fire.

A hand stealing out from shelter fell on his blanket and came away chilled by the touch of the white rime which lay thickly there. By that he knew the strengthening light would show everything bearded with frost crystals. He had slept fairly comfortably, having kept his head covered, which is a little bit of wisdom the Indian long ago taught his white brother, and so his breath had helped to heat his body.

He sat up to yawn and to stretch and rub his eyes, and having done these things, he looked about him and then he gave a deep grunt of astonishment. A light

shone out of the window of the cabin alongside him, its shafted beams falling almost across his legs. As he uprighted himself the slab door swung open and he saw, silhouetted against the indifferent gleam of a candle burning behind her, the outlines of the tenant to whom he had given his bed and his roof the night before.

"Are you all right?" he asked, taking a step or two toward her out of the murk.

"Of course."

"But what are you doing up so early? The dawn's barely started."

"For one thing, I've been waiting for you to rouse up," his ward answered him blithely. "I've been awake quite a while—awake and busy, too, part of the time."

"Wait a minute until I can stir up this fire," he told her. "It's pretty cold outside here."

"Please do; then I'll show you what I've been busied at—you'll be surprised!" There was a note of exultation in her voice.

Wondering, he fanned the grayed charred embers to life, fed the young flame with tinder of dried twigs and chips, piled on short lengths of wood. When the rosy tongues were licking up and fusing, ruddy and cheerful, Ransom, still kneeling, heard footsteps behind him and a little metallic jangling sound; and the

girl came forward into the ring of illumination. Circling the blaze she faced him from across it, her face all aglow and smiling.

"Look!" she said. He looked, and with a smothered exclamation, "Well, I'll be—" reared back on his heels.

Her hands were liberated, not ironed as he had seen them last. From her fingers dangled the cuffs which had bound her, their unlatched jaws hanging ajar; and the red radiance was reflected on their linked chain so that as she shook them toward him jubilantly, the fetters took on the semblance of a writhing two-headed snake with the twin mouths gaping.

"Why, you've got them undone somehow!" he cried out, getting on his feet. "They're unlocked."

"Unlocked but still dangerous," she said. "See here," she illustrated. "Once they're off you can shove them through themselves as often as you please." Metal grated and clinked as she manipulated the revolving mechanism of the circlets. "It's only when you slip them over something solid—for instance, over a doomed damsel's wrists, as per yesterday at Quartz Lake—that they make it bothersome for whoever has to wear them."

"But all by yourself, there in the pitchy black, how did you manage it?" he demanded.

"Save your grief," she said. "I haven't crushed

any of my bones—they only ache a little. See, the skin isn't even broken. And I wasn't in utter darkness either—thanks to you. I waked up about an hour ago, I'd say it was, with a bad cramp in my arms; they'd been so long in one position, you know."

He made a small wordless sound of pity for her.

"Otherwise I felt splendidly; all rested and fine after sleeping like the dead since twilight last evening. I sat up and I fumbled about me with my hands and on a little shelf just alongside the bed I found a candle and some matches that you must have put there when I was too far gone to notice what you were doing. So I got the candle lighted and I saw water and soap and a tin basin and a towel on a box in one corner—and even a little hand-mirror hanging on a peg in the wall above. You'd done that too, no doubt, kind thoughtful sir that you are.

"So first of all I soaped my hands and my wrists till they were all dripping with suds, and by compressing this left hand here at its thickest part I succeeded in working that cuff off, just as I told you yesterday I believed I possibly might do; and after that it was comparatively easy to get the right cuff off. Oh, but it was good to be rid of the things! After my hands quit hurting where they'd been squeezed, I washed my face, which certainly needed it—going to bed I must have looked like a tramp. And then I did

my hair and since then I've been waiting for you to wake up. You are a sound sleeper! If the enemy had stolen up this mountain last night—well, I shudder at the mere thought of it!”

“I admit it,” he said. “Most men who've spent as many nights in the open as I have learn to cat-nap—they bounce out of it at the least sound. I've tried to drill myself into the same trick, but I can't. When I go to sleep I'm gone. I'm sorry; why didn't you call me?”

“Oh, I wasn't lonely. When I wasn't peeping out to see whether you showed any signs of waking yet, I was sitting on the side of my downy couch studying out the principle of these handcuffs. Really they're quite scientific—I imagine the man who patented them is very proud of his invention.” She shook them gaily.

“Proving it takes all kinds of people to make this world,” he retorted. “Let me throw the damnable things down a hole in the rock somewhere. I never want to see them again—they're wicked and cruel and mean.”

“Oh, you mustn't think of doing that,” she reproved with an arch make-believe severity. “They have a duty to perform and they perform it. And after all they aren't ours, you know—they belong to another young gentleman. And if ever he should visit us—”

"He won't, I'll guarantee to attend to that." There was a purring menace in what he said. He was making a threat of it.

"I repeat, if he should drop in on us for an unexpected call, he'd probably inquire for his missing property; and what could we say to him then—especially since you went on record yesterday as saying you thought I was honest at heart? No, I'm sure we'd better keep them, if you don't mind. I'll hang them up in the cabin for remembrance—as a souvenir of our first meeting." As she slipped them into her pocket the mock gravity left her. "Our meeting of yesterday when I was so forlorn and you were so generous and so compassionate to me—that's a thing I shan't forget, ever, no matter what hereafter might come between us. I want you to believe that." A little melancholy surge—almost like a whisper of unquenchable premonition for some deplored possibility—rose in her voice.

"Don't you worry," he assured her, interpreting her new mood as one having dread for herself lurking in the background of it. "You're going to lick these bloodhounds yet. This just happens to be the hour you're likely to feel a bit blue and downhearted."

"Downhearted, when there's a sunrise like that one coming yonder? Not I!" she exclaimed. "Look—it's marvelous."

He faced where she pointed. The green was gone from the daybreak, the pale yellow also, and the sky was opening like a golden gate in a bending wall of amethyst and porphyry; and through the rayed portals, as they watched, the sun fairly leaped, bursting forth full-blown over the farther edge of his transfigured world so that on the instant the frost-flowers about them became billions of bright glittering spangles. There was silver tinseling on Boone's blankets, a brocaded cloak of silver plush fitted snugly over the shoulders of every boulder-top around about, close-set strands of silver beading winked up at them from each separate stem of the faded herbage that sprouted out of the cracks in the rocky flooring of their citadel.

Velvety cloud-wrack covered such of the higher eminences as were visible to them above the mural of the rim-rock, but while the pair looked these palls began to split asunder as though some mighty hidden hand had ripped them one by one, and the mist began to rise in pennons and swirls from the crests. For the moment there was a simulation of that time, back eons ago when creation was flux and aflame and some of the peaks had been fuming volcanoes.

Joan looked her fill, he waiting beside her. There was a shrewd bite to the air that made her shiver a little. He pulled off a heavy mackinaw jacket in

which he had slept and made her put it on. It was warm with the warmth of his body, and she snuggled into it, her numbed hands muffled in its sleeves and its collar soothingly upturned about her ears. Their shadows stretched behind them as stenciled caricatures, faint, slim, and exaggeratedly elongated. He suggested breakfast, and the idea of it had appeal for her.

“You’re a mind-reader,” she applauded. “Last night I was too tired to help but this morning and from now on I do my share.”

XVII

Breakfast for Two

ABOUT the breakfasting there was an atmosphere of an established and placid domesticity. During their preparation for it she inwardly remarked his competency and deftness. In him was manifest none of the slovenliness which marks the average man engaged at outdoor cookery. He knew how to keep a frying-pan free from drifting sparks, had the knack of heating food without making it smoky, was gifted at balancing a coffee-pot on tricky fagots. Moreover, as she now might note in glances lifted from her own small tasks, the camp-ground had been frequently and thoroughly cleansed. For instance, this flat stone which served for a dining table showed signs of a recent and very painstaking scouring; and the fire-wood was bestowed in a compact pile, and nowhere were there scraps of waste or emptied tin cans to be seen. She saw a flame-blackened trench in a triangled seam of the rock near by and divined its purpose. Rubbish had been burned there.

“You’ve learned neatness somewhere, young man.”

"I had to," he said, grinning that companionable grin of his. "More than once in the army they had me on kitchen police. And afterwards I was in the forestry service—and that teaches a fellow how to be careful about fires and camp litter." As he spoke he in his turn was admiring the grace of her body, her womanly handling of utensils.

"There are two tin plates here," she called from an improvised pantry on a shelflike ledge, "but I can find only one fork. And there are two knives; one of them is a butcher-knife though."

"When I settled up here I wasn't expecting any guests and I only brought enough tableware for one. So today you'll be the company and I'll forget my party manners and eat with my fingers. The first chance I get I'll elaborate our housekeeping equipment."

"But you did bring some books with you—heavy textbooky-looking books. They must have almost broken your back when you were carrying them up that trail. Why, you've quite a little library there in the cabin—books on trees and civil engineering. I glanced at them a while ago. They're most impressive looking."

"Well, you see, I didn't bring them all up at once. I fetched them in piecemeal—one or two at a trip along with other things." He proceeded to eluci-

date: "This isn't my first sojourn in this place—not by any means it isn't. It's been nearly a year since I stumbled on this spot. Sticking to the regular trail, you might never find it; because that trail winds around to the far side of the peak from here and virtually ends three or four hundred yards below at a sort of little plateau. But one day, quite by accident, while I was skirting along crosswise down on one of the lower slopes, I struck the other trail.

"I don't know who first made it—Indians probably, although the Indians weren't such great hands for prowling on the mountains. They believed there were evil spirits in the thick timber and the high places and mainly they stuck to the plains and only climbed when they wanted to spy out the land for enemies or game. Well, no matter who'd cut that trail, it had been forgotten. It was all grown over and rocks had fallen in it. Curiosity got the better of me and I followed it and eventually it brought me out up here. And right here I found this cabin—or the ruins of it. I think once upon a time it must have been what the early settlers called an Injun rock house—a shelter and a watch-tower for ranging war-parties.

"It struck my fancy. I like privacy sometimes—some secluded nook where I can study. What with children and all, it's pretty crowded in my sister's

cabin down in the cove where I've lived, off and on, since my mother died. So, odd times, I punched in a hole for a window and I made a door-frame out of slabs and fitted a door and swung it; and I mended the sides and chinked the crannies with dried moss and built a roof that's a trifle airy but tolerably weather-proof, except when it rains too hard. It was more like play than work. And bit by bit I brought up a few tools and a pot and a pan or so and blankets and reading matter and the rest of the stuff that you'll find cached about here by looking for it. It wasn't much but it was enough for my needs.

"And every trip, going and coming, I obliterated the trail at two points—away below where it peters out into a ravine not an eighth of a mile up behind my uncle's grazing lot—the same lot in which his windmill stands—and again much higher where I dragged you through that worst thicket of jack-pines yesterday. I didn't want anybody else sharing this little secret with me even though at the beginning it never occurred to me that I might ever want to use this retreat for a hide-out from the law. . . . Well, anyhow that's the yarn of it."

While he was telling her this she, pausing momentarily from tending sundry strips of bacon which sizzled on the skillet and sent up most appetizing smells, had been taking stock of their immediate sur-

roundings. She saw how the little hutch with its walls of makeshift masonry and its canted roof was nestled in under the buttresses of a jagged pinnacle which reared above and behind the building, its top sheared off this way and that in an effect of sharp gables; and how on all other quarters a fairly flat circle of terrain lay within the circumference of the jagged rim so that the spot whereon she stood was approximately the center of what very much resembled the enclosed parade-ground of a very small fortress comprising a total area of perhaps an acre.

In its middle curve, directly in front of her present station and on a line with the door of the cabin—she took passing cognizance of that fact—was the one spot where the encompassing frieze revealed a completed crevice, as though an Herculean hammer had smitten on the rock until there it gaped down to the level of the earth. That, then, must have been the passage through which she had been carried last night; yes, it was, for she could make out the beginning of the natural ramp leading outward and downward from it. Now it was quite closed off, which proved to her that after she had been borne in, her guardian must have returned and barred the opening.

He had been most exact in this added act of trusteeship—on her account probably more exacting than usual—because the barricading fragments were piled

breast-high, and across the top layer of them a heavy, bristly dead tree top had been thrust to form an effective abatis. There were a few living pines scattered over the ringed-in terrace. They were all of them stunted and gnarly and had their roots half exposed where they stubbornly were fixed, limpet-wise, on the rocks. Living trees must mean coursing veins of water underground, but of a spring or other source of water supply within the breastwork Joan could discover no evidence.

Breakfast being over, there remained almost enough cooked food for another meal; it developed that Ransom had a motive behind this apparent prodigality. They must spend the day on his watch-tower two-thirds down the mountain; there at noon they would spread a picnic luncheon. To the surplus he added a can of dried beef and one of peaches—"air-tights," he called these, using plainsman's vernacular—and made a snug parcel of the whole of it.

While she washed the dishes in water which had been boiling in a bucket swung by its bail on a crotched stick over the fire—for Joan would have it that doing this was part of her duties—he renewed the stock of kindling, his ax-blade flashing like quicksilver as he chopped and split, and the big chips leaping. Out of a corner of her eye she gave a covert scrutiny to the lithe surge of his body from the hips,

the muscular freedom of all his limbs, the easy assurance and infallibility of his strokes. Whatever this young man did he seemed to do so exceedingly well. She somehow divined that whatever his other shortcomings might be, he could shoot straight, ride well, run fast, vault high, and when occasion required, pounce suddenly and strike hard. Why, he was quick as a panther in his movements.

When her drying cloths had been wrung out and spread on a rock, he told her she now must see what lay to the north and west of them so thereafter she might never concern herself over the peril of a surprise attack at the rear.

"From the standpoint of our system of defense, there's only one drawback to the situation," he added. "If nobody can come on us from the back, it's just as much of a cinch that we can't hope to escape in that direction. We'd only break our necks."

She saw how and why this was so, when together they had mounted by rude footholds and handholds to a post of observation in the rim-rock to the left of the cabin and some ten feet above its angling roof. She discovered then the cabin had behind it a small lean-to evidently intended for the storage of bulky objects and extra supplies. Also she discovered that the bevel-topped spindle which abutted on their abiding-place was a falsifier. It did not form the extreme

summit of the peak as she had until this moment supposed. Beyond it, and heretofore hidden, was the real summit soaring sundry hundreds of feet higher.

Now this taller tip, which was almost entirely bare of vegetation, might be likened to the pier for a mighty bridge—a bridge swinging away from that gaunt anchorage in a tremendous sway-backed dip and, midway of the span where it narrowed in suddenly, broken entirely through by some geologic fault in the supporting strata. To her view, which was a bird's-eye view, the phenomenon had very much the aspect of a bridge which had collapsed in its center by reason of structural weakness in the underpinnings. It was a bridge which no human foot could cross, that was certain.

So much for the north. Stretching her neck and looking directly downward through a convenient interstice, she beheld what instinctively made her blink and flinch a little. Running a continuing circling course at an average of five or six feet below her, was a very narrow jog like a fire-step for sharpshooters misplaced on the outer side of a rampart instead of being on the inner where properly a fire-step belonged. No, there was an apter comparison; it was like a swollen protuberance in the gums of a grinning lower jaw following the truncation of the tooth-roots, for indeed these serrated formations of the rim suggested

the simile of enormous incisors firmly socketed, touching at the bases but separated and aloof at their biting edges.

Far below this first small out-jut—say eight hundred or a thousand feet below—there stretched out over space a considerably wider shelf or, as a Westerner might say, “a bench,” hanging inaccessibly on the air and ending precipitately, right and left, in nothingness. These two were the only interruptions to a sheer straight drop extending almost to the foot of the mountain, where deposits from the cascade of the original cataclysm were massed in tremendous piles. It was the scar of a landslip—a stone-slip, rather—and by that agonized convulsion of ages before, what formerly was one slant of the peak had become a pit formidable to look upon and not to be scaled by anything going on two legs or four. A Brobdingnagian spider might clamber up its sheer frontal, but neither a man nor a beast, forever and ever, world without end, amen!

“Even now, once in a blue moon, damaging avalanches still occur,” Ransom told her. “But this one was surely the granddaddy of them all. Old Marster must have been in a playful mood anyhow when he carved out this range.”

The fascination of staring into that fearsome abyss—the feeling of clinging like a fly on the verge of

a bottomless slide—held Joan for a spell. Then Ransom began identifying for her some of the neighboring heights. The dome-shaped green one dead ahead of them across the chasm—that was Squaw's Breast. She could appreciate the aptness of such entitlement; the mountain was rounded and smooth and it bulged out like a full udder. And that next fellow was War Bonnet; the pines ran in skimpy alignments over the crest like dyed eagle plumes in a fighting buck's head-dress. And that somewhat flattened third one on beyond was, for no recorded reason, known as Lost Lady Butte. If ever there had been a legend to account for the naming of it the legend was forgotten. And so on and so forth.

"Why did they christen this peak Shivery Peak, I wonder," she said.

"That's easily explained," he said. "There's a tradition that originally it was called Chivalry Peak—I don't know why. I've heard somewhere that it's set down so on some of the very old maps of this region. You can see how Chivalry might easily have been corrupted into Shivery."

"I vote to go back then to the first name," she declared. "Lost Lady, over there—that's for me. I was lost until you came and found me and succored me. But Chivalry here"—her voice softened and she patted affectionately a fretted knob of the

rock and smiled up at him as she finished—"Chivalry is for you, as I can testify, Boone Ransom."

"Don't flatter me—I'm probably vain enough as it is," he said. But for all his disclaimer she could tell that he was pleased.

"Time for us to be moving," he said after a very brief pause in which neither spoke. "The sun's climbing higher."

With their boots making soft scrunching, crinkling sounds on the rimy carpeting they crossed the enclosure, he, as he passed, catching up his rifle from within the door of the rock house. His revolver already was in its holster at his hip. He slipped the wrapped-up snack into his pouch and hauled aside the dead pine top and pulled away the stones of the barricade at the outlet to their little compound.

They had gone perhaps a hundred yards along the coasting trail when he, traveling in front, came to a standstill.

"I'd almost overlooked the one modern convenience of this mountain top," he announced. "That's the private bathroom."

"A bathroom!"

"Well, a sort of one at least." He aimed with his finger at an almost invisible path threading into the thicket. "A couple of hundred feet farther on in there is the spring where I get my drinking water. That

spring feeds into a kind of little pool that has a nice clean stone bottom. And if a person doesn't mind a dip in water that's almost icy cold—"

"I don't! I love it! Can you give me ten minutes—eight minutes?"

"Certainly."

"Then I'm about to make the beginnings of this day gloriously complete. Wait for me down a little distance farther on. I shan't be long." She retreated up the trail swiftly. "I'm going for towels and soap—that's all," she called back.

"Hold on, I'll run get them for you."

"Should a modest and well-bred maiden suffer a comparative stranger to fetch the things for her bath—never, never!" she bade him, laughing at him over her shoulder.

So he descended for a quarter of a mile, singing to himself as he went, and waited there; and presently she rejoined him and they descended, while out of the void below them where the ardent young sun was melting the frost on slopes lower down, the white mists rose like the smoke from lime slaking in some incredibly great kiln.

XVIII

Fresh Worries for Several Friends

THERE was no doubt about it, the week now rounding out to its conclusion had been a most wearing week upon Mr. Herbert Tendon. It was hard enough, bad enough, to be cooped up in this stodgy town of Gateway. It was still harder to control his chagrin over the failure of the aggregated reward-seekers out at the Mallard's Nest to circumvent their man and fetch him in, either dead or a prisoner bound. Mr. Tendon preferred to picture him as a riddled corpse. His speculations when not morose were of a sanguinary hue. Deeds of forthright violence he heretofore abhorred, for always Mr. Tendon had attained his stratagems by craft and by guile, leaving to cruder, more primitive hands those messy elemental methods for separating a fool and his money. Now, though, there were hours when he felt absolutely bloodthirsty, whole days when secretly he was shaken by gusts of a murderous passion.

From Shupmann and Wise, twenty-odd hundreds of miles away on the Broadway beloved of all three

of them, came solicitous telegraphed queries which disquieted Mr. Tendon. Also those two absent ones flashed across the continent sundry private tidings of not altogether a soothing import. In these messages the name "Bullard" frequently recurred. Mr. Tendon knew very well what the reiteration of that word meant even if the local operator who took these cryptic communications off the wire did not. It meant much to Mr. Tendon and his plans. Conceivably and in certain contingencies it might mean a great deal more. He blasphemed while he decoded.

Lesser annoyances mated and bred and multiplied, replenishing his mind with misgivings. For example, stock subscriptions to the Cutthroat River Lands & Reclamation Corporation had diminished almost to the vanishing point since last Monday's hold-up. Residents with money available for investment purposes suddenly had become deeply interested in repetitious recitals of that crime, in asking for particulars as to the exact amount taken, in their curiosity regarding the nature of the contents of Mr. Tendon's stolen portfolios. Correspondingly they seemed more and more reluctant about signing on the dotted line at Mr. Holtzer's bank.

As yet Mr. Tendon's keen and appreciative nostrils could sniff no suspicion on the autumnal air, or at least could sniff nothing which might definitely be

called suspicion. But there was a sense of uneasiness abroad; this he could feel as an intangible, indefinable element of the situation locally. It called for the best of Mr. Tendon's abilities as an actor to maintain on his part that fine and orotund optimism, that splendid enthusiasm which had marked his advent into these parts back at the beginning of the month.

To top all, a damned impertinent newspaperman had descended upon him out of the hinterland. Representing the leading daily of one of the larger Coast cities, a young man with an impudent tilt to his nose and a pair of exceedingly wide-awake eyes in his head had appeared unexpectedly on Thursday and on behalf of his journal had asked—yes, practically demanded an interview; that was what it amounted to. The admirable loyalty and the beautiful devotion which Editor Endicott continued to voice in his columns for the allied Tendon enterprises apparently entertained this youth without exactly convincing him.

Internally much harassed but with a nicely counterfeited cast of candor in his bearing, Mr. Tendon received the reporter—McNally was the name—in his rooms at the hotel. Ever since the train robbery he had been dreading some such visit and in advance had been building his statements for publication. So it might not be said that he was unprepared. Nor

in all his life as a promoter of industrial enterprises had Mr. Tendon been more plausible, or more eloquent or outwardly more gracious. He gladly welcomed all proper canvasses into his present great project, as he said at the outset. He pressed a handful of cigars on young McNally, referred discreetly to the clandestine presence of a filled decanter in a locked drawer of his dresser and offered to broach the same provided the visitor felt like imbibing a little nip of stuff guaranteed to be prime and pre-war.

The trouble was, though, that Mr. McNally refused to follow obediently the lines along which Mr. Tendon would have guided him. The cigars he accepted; the suggestion of an appetizer he waved aside, although intimating that he might favorably reconsider the idea later on and, so saying, he squared away and began firing at his vis-à-vis a disconcerting broadside of sentences all ending in very barbed interrogation marks. Just who were the outstanding members of Mr. Tendon's syndicate back East? What notably successful exploitations of natural resources had Mr. Tendon carried on in the past? And when? And where? Also how about his franchise for the irrigation project? The old franchise, a survival of the first abortive design for putting Cutthroat River to work, had lapsed years before. What steps, if any,

had lately been taken touching on its renewal? These questions, among others, he asked and pressed with all due politeness but specifically and categorically for answers.

Mr. Tendon parried and fenced and, more than that, once under the strain of matching wits against this inquisitor, had occasion to mop beadings of perspiration from his temples, but withal managed to appear bland and friendly, combining affability with a betokened growing fondness for Mr. McNally's personality.

Absolutely in confidence, he admitted there were divers important details which as yet he was not quite at liberty to divulge. Mr. McNally would understand that in a proposition involving millions and concerning enormous financial interests in Wall Street, a degree of professional reticence might be not only justified but absolutely essential to a successful culmination. There were envious competitors who would be only too glad to profit by any slips of the tongue in which he might indulge. For—let Mr. McNally believe it or not—various men of money and affairs, naming no names, of course, were not above trying to steal another man's thunder. As to those other things regarding which Mr. McNally was solicitous for information—well, in short, the situation was thus and so, or so and thus, as the case might

be. And Mr. McNally, apparently satisfied, would jot down figures or facts—at least Mr. Tendon hoped Mr. McNally was regarding them as such—and then would renew his volleying attacks. He was full of queries.

Mr. Tendon tired long before Mr. McNally's enfilading fire slackened. He sincerely welcomed the close of the conference. In conclusion he tactfully hinted that if Mr. McNally cared to let him glance over the notes he had taken he, Mr. Tendon, would be quite grateful for the opportunity and—he trusted—might be helpful. This overture having been rejected as journalistically unethical, Mr. Tendon next was moved, still most diplomatically, to inquire whether Mr. McNally would be so good as to let him read the first completed draft of Mr. McNally's manuscript. Quite by accident some misstatement might creep into the copy, in which event he would be only too happy to lend himself to deleting or revising the matter at fault.

But Mr. McNally explained that he did not expect to write out his story until after his return to his city-room. If when the article or articles finally appeared—he intimated that there might be two or three of them, forming a sort of series—any material mistakes appeared anywhere in them, Mr. Tendon would find the columns of Mr. McNally's paper open to him

for corrections. He was afraid though that was the very best he could do. And now, should Mr. Tendon care to renew his hospitable invitation of an hour or two earlier, Mr. McNally admitted that he might possibly be induced to partake of a libation to their better acquaintance—or in other words, wet down his throat. Maybe Mr. Tendon would join him?

Mr. Tendon did, secretly hoping Mr. McNally might choke. The latter gagged slightly on the raw Scotch but he did not choke, and then he shook hands with Mr. Tendon and went away, leaving behind him, for all his affability, a sort of pregnant, not to say ominous, impendency of potential disaster which Mr. Tendon had great difficulty in casting off. In trying to cast it off, he had recourse to the bottle lately uncorked in Mr. McNally's honor. When the shades of evening fell the bottle, now empty, had rolled under the bed and Mr. Tendon was in the bed sound asleep with his clothes on.

For reasons arising from different yet, after a fashion, interrelated motives at least three individuals besides Mr. Tendon had occasion that Saturday afternoon to turn their own thoughts toward the same general quarter on which some of his were concentrated, before this prying youngster McNally came to shove a meddling nose into other people's business.

There was Mr. Caspar Pelky managing a home-

ward course for his perambulating household. As he hunched behind the steering-post with his squinted eyes aimlessly fixed on the hillocky, swerving road ahead of him, his mind became detached from the job in hand, and under the siftings of fine silt which covered it his mobile face took on a look dreamy and abstracted; but there was a trace of pensive sadness in it too, enhancing the lines which forty years had graven on that plastic background. What tricks of contrariness Fate sometimes played on a man, to be sure!

He loved his family devotedly, as every rightly ordered husband and father should. And surely Mrs. Pelky was what a wife and helpmate should be. She was zealous, she was efficient, she was of a commanding appearance—possibly because she always insisted on commanding—but she was scarcely on the decorative order. Why, after reaching a certain age, did women have to let their figures just go? It never before had occurred to him that Mrs. Pelky criminally was letting hers go. And now, by Hector, it was practically gone. It went, as you might say, both ways at once.

Dozing beside him now, with her mouth ajar, she so billowed out that here on the front seat there barely was room for her and for him and for Master John J. Pershing Pelky and the pup and one wadded

bed-quilt and a few oddments and ends. And dad-gum her, she kept swaying up against him, and jouncing up against him, and digging him in the short-ribs with her elbow!

Temporarily he dismissed his comatose lady from the equations of his reverie. There were his children—four as spry youngsters as anybody ever saw and for their ages smart as a whip, every last doggoned one of them. But children, no matter how attractive personally, were encumbrances, drags on a career; broodily to himself he admitted that. When a fellow took and let himself get married, especially a man who thus took and let himself when he really was too young to know his own mind, before he'd had a chance to look around and size up the opposite sex, and then on top of that when he set in to bringing a whole mess of young ones into the world and raising them and giving them a liberal education such as was only to be got by toting them around over the country in a flivver—well, that fellow certainly was surrendering his independence then, and no two ways about it. Just a slave and a drudge—that's all he was from that time thenceforward. He might call himself free—but, *huh!*

By one swiftly scored mental process Mr. Pelky freed himself from the galling oars of this jouncing, overflowing tin galley of his. By another he rid

himself of all domestic and matrimonial entanglements. He did not exactly abolish his brood; he merely made them nameless and nebulous. By yet a third, he jauntily projected his astral body two hundred dusty miles rearward to the shade-dappled strands of Quartz Lake and turned back the clock of time to yesterday morning.

He was a bachelor, a cavalier unattached and fancy-free, a latter-day knight errant going to and fro on the face of the earth, seeking for deeds of derring-do; in appearance he was youthful, almost juvenile in fact, and in his bosom the heart of a buoyant boy was abeat. Yet was he likewise one of a seasoned and suave port and with a mien of dignity indicative of wide experience with the affairs of the world.

So, faring along, he came upon an inhuman minion of the law who would have put bonds upon the limbs of a fair maid in riding-breeches, having first accused her of some trivial irregularity in connection with the United States mails. What of that? With one stroke of his fist Mr. Pelky stretched the presumptuous Jack Ketch flat upon the turf. He wrested the shackles from those prisoned wrists. He caught up the grateful girl in his arms and bore her in his arms to his waiting car, which was a magnificent eight-cylinder, stream-line, seven-passenger, full-

upholstered car, scarcely to be coupled in the same breath with that wallowing orphanage on rickety wheels with its burden of anonymous ex-Pelkys which tomorrow—that is to say today—would be wending a creaking voyage toward the inconsequential community of Red Oak, Iowa.

With the fair misdemeanant cuddled beside him, shyly confessing for him love at first sight, he fled afar. 'Together they laughed at pursuit; together laughed at laws, for laws were made for serfs. To only one ordinance of all those on the statute books did they give heed. By a fortuitous circumstance meeting a kind-faced gospeler who trudged the road across the waste spaces over which they sped, they halted for long enough to permit the man of God to pronounce the words which made them man and wife; then tore on, even as he bespoke a blessing upon this connubial pair. They were bride and bridegroom, off on a delicious, perilous honeymoon. They were—

The caravan struck a stump of a juniper where Mr. Pelky's unseeing eyes had suffered it to stray from the beaten track. It reared like a buck-jumping bronco and careened and shifted the various items of its ballast and threatened to capsize altogether. Then, largely through force of habit, the long-suffering thing righted itself. And Mrs. Pelky snapped out

of her trance, and for his carelessness proceeded to give Mr. Pelky what she called a piece of her mind. She opined he wanted to turn the whole shebang over and wreck it and smash up everything in it and break everybody's neck into the bargain! She guessed maybe he specially wanted to get her thrown out and killed—driving along that shiftless way, fast asleep with his eyes open and in the broad daylight! Was that it, then?

That, for the time being, emphatically was it. But Mr. Pelky did not say so. Poor, persecuted, romantic, justifiably homicidal Mr. Pelky said nothing. He only sighed gustily through the overhang of a drooping sandy mustache shading to gray at its roots.

Then there was the temperamental Mr. Hank Doheny. Here was one who chafed vehemently against the enforced quietude prevalent among the besiegers encamped in the Mallard's Nest. What he wanted, he declared, was activity; he for one was tired of doing nothing. From private sources he secured that Saturday a quart of so-called moonshine. Selfishly he consumed most of it. The effect was not to smooth his touchy nature; rather it made him more irritable over the failure of the sheriff to order an advance in force against the asylum of the train robber, made him more belligerent, not to say overbearing, in his attitude toward his present associates.

He swaggered about the vicinity—that is, he was swaggering when he wasn't lurching—upsetting the loose discipline, which until then had prevailed not so much by exercise of any conferred authority but largely as a matter of mutual forbearance and individual restraint. Eventually he forced a quarrel upon one of the quietest of his colleagues—a cowboy of most inoffensive demeanor who didn't even wear the traditional habiliments of his calling but went about clothed in a simple outfit of blue overalls and a battered derby hat.

The latter took on the gage of battle. By a sudden and, on the part of Mr. Doheny, totally unexpected onslaught, he disarmed that surprised gentleman of his pendent side-arms and gave him a sound clouting, nor stayed his wrathful hands until the adversary was half senseless and wholly subdued. The affair furnished an agreeable diversion for the onlookers, who were feeling somewhat bored anyhow. It gave a touch of pleasurable excitement to an otherwise monotonous afternoon.

The pummeled victim was removed to his tent, Sheriff Rowley accompanying the cortège of snickering bearers to warn whomsoever it might concern that if somebody, as a result of this little misunderstanding, subsequently undertook to make a gun-play, that vengeful somebody would have him and

his artillery to deal with. Apparently he addressed his remarks to the company generally, but he was looking directly at Mr. Doheny while he delivered them.

Hostilities were not renewed but a new nickname for Mr. Doheny sprang into vogue immediately. A member of the posse coined it on the spot out of his own head; from all sides he received congratulations upon his choice of words. Thereafter Gateway's fallen idol would be known not as "Cold Blood" Doheny but derisively as "Bogus" Doheny.

Finally there was Anse Cyphers, most sinister of the four figures engaged that same day in these more or less centralized speculations. Maggots gnawed busily inside his skull; they had been gnawing there for more than twenty-four hours now. Within his brain delectably lewd thoughts mingled with surmises, conjectures, doubts, suspicions. He was matching this circumstance with that and constantly when he was alone was bringing out of his shirt, where he carried it against his skin, a soiled and crumpled reward notice, to stare a while with famished, covetous eyes at the face printed on its surface. That girl now—where was she? What had happened to her? What had become of her?

Establishing a rude sequence, he hearkened back in his reckonings to the day before. Take for a

starter this young man Julian Clyde. That ambitious thief-taker had, about noon-time, limped in afoot, nursing a seemingly disabled right arm and for some unexplained reason looking very glum. He had drawn Sheriff Rowley apart and had confabbed with him. Cyphers saw them with their heads together.

Then Clyde had sent one of his brace of underlings off to fetch in his stranded car where he had left it close up under the connecting angle of the rock spur. The car, apparently in good order, had been brought in but with no occupants except the returning messenger who said nothing. It was known, though, that the car on entering the outermost bight, less than an hour earlier than this, had contained two passengers—Clyde was one and the other a slim stranger whom the sentries there had not closely noticed.

No pother was made of this circumstance. Coming to the main camp for their supper, the watchers had spoken quite casually of this incident, and Cyphers's eagerly twitching ears had caught their words. No one else might attach undue significance to the disclosure, but he did. He had his reasons. He might yet be in the dark but not in so dense a darkness as were those others yonder about the mess table. This was a riddle to be solved. Did he alone of them all, barring only Clyde and possibly the sheriff, have the right reading for it?

Filled with a greedy, nagging restlessness, he would shamble every few minutes outdoors to stare at the peak, his eyes turned first on its timbered base, then straining up and on up to its nude crest. Old Shivery loomed there inscrutable. Cloaked in its smooth tabard of Lincoln green, it yielded him nothing. But a little while later he once more would be trudging like a caged bear back and forth behind his store and looking, always looking toward the monstrous clump; and one hand, as like as not, would be inside his shirt fumbling at the cardboard and the other would be picking at the shagginess of his tormented chin. Was she up there somewhere? Alone? Or with—?

As the swift gloaming of late September thickened about him he still was pacing his shortened beat, not vainly searching now for signs of life along the dimmed lower slopes but peering steadily toward the apex, ruddy with the beams of the sunshine dying behind it.

Some thirty-five hundred feet above where Anse Cyphers kept his slouching, persistent vigil, Anse Cyphers's stepnephew and one other were sitting quite at peace and in accord side by side on a small log before a crackling fire. He was smoking his first after-supper cigarette; she had brought from her kit-bag on her bed in the rock house a threaded needle with

which to mend a forked rip where a twig had torn the sleeve of his shirt.

The afterglow was rosy and lambent about them. The young Southerner had a feeling, so he told himself, which some prehistoric ancestor of his likewise had experienced once upon just such a time, crouching at the doorway of his cave with his mate beside him. It was as though a primeval instinct had called back through unnumbered centuries the agreeable vision of another evening like unto this—an evening that lay thousands upon piled-up thousands of years behind him perhaps, yet was potent still to thrum on an atavistic chord within him.

That of course must be a fancy born of the spiritual harmonies of this moment, but of another thing he was very sure: a woman's presence had brought tangible and comforting essences to this mountain-top of his. A spray of vine-maple, its leaves turned a bright scarlet by the frost, made a patch of color where it lay on their stone dining table. Her light-fingering touch on his arm while she plied her needle started up a pleasant little tingling inside of him. Then she had made such gorgeous flapjacks for the evening meal—better flapjacks than any he could have made.

He stretched his legs in a little ecstasy of present perfect contentment. They had had rather a wonder-

ful day together. Really an idyllic day, he told himself, but wisely he chose not to risk marring the memories of it by reviewing it aloud.

What he said, as the seamstress gave his sleeve a little pat with her palm to show the job had been finished, was that he feared the commissary might be running low since an added drain had been put upon it.

"I expect I'd better make another trip down tomorrow night and pack more chow back up. Maybe you'll be wanting something for yourself too?"

"I surely will. Since you mention it, there're quite a number of—well, things that I'm beginning to need. Specially stockings. I'll make you out a list in the morning. From all indications, as I see them, this little week-end party of ours may last even longer than over the week-end."

"Speaking for one, I'd not care how much longer it lasted," he said.

She appeared not to have heard this last. Her face was averted, her brow puckered as though by some deep perplexity; she seemed profoundly interested in a nodule of quartz at her feet. With her toe she turned it.

"Oh, by the way," she added, "why should you feel called on to chaperon me all the way here tomorrow evening? Before it gets too dark I'll start

back up alone. I know the route by now—I studied it today, both going and coming. You can wait at the watch-tower until the moon's out and then go down. Don't you see—that will save you miles of absolutely unnecessary tramping?"

He protested that the extra trip meant nothing to him, but she insisted, and it was so agreed.

With his head buried in his blanket that night just before he fell asleep, it occurred to Ransom, with a little fillip of surprise, that not once throughout that long day had he renewed the subject of her ultimate escape. Indeed, now that he came to think about it, the matter had not been in his mind at all. Nor did he desire now to revive the contingency of losing her. He put it from him as a thing suddenly grown distasteful—a thing to be undertaken later when emergencies might arise, but not tonight and not tomorrow and not for a while. He told himself that this passiveness in his mental attitude was due to his drowsiness.

He yawned and drifted off, and agreeable dreams possessed him.

XIX

The Lady Man Friday

THAT next day in its essentials was much as the day before had been—a day of indolence on their second aerie two-thirds of the distance down Shivery. An immense peacefulness brooded there, yet a peacefulness cloistered and enclosed. To the young exiles it seemed that they were a million miles removed from the squalor and the temptations and disputations of that organized turmoil which a strife-ful mankind calls civilization.

The sparse hardwoods had put on the perishable war-paints of Indian summer, which in these parts is a fleeting season, so that in the prevailing texture of the mountain's darker and more somber dress there showed spats and splotches of party-color—bronze or copper or cardinal or crimson—like rosettes sown haphazard on a forester's coat. Anse Cyphers's windmill was motionless, its notched semaphore set at the slant which meant continued truce with their adversaries. Unless it shifted, they need have no fear of a sortie in their direction. The steep

heights above their sanctuary, the massed foliage below, would remain inviolate and undisturbed, and within the limits of caution they might, until the beacon changed, if change it should, range where it pleased them to range.

They did no ranging though. They entirely were content to bide on in their nest of trampled ferns and fading grasses, with the sun shining upon them and a breeze blowing in gusts and spurts and bringing up to them the precious tangs of the forest. The air had literally a taste to it. Breathing it was like taking drams of some thin savory liqueur.

From time to time divers small tragedies and small wildwood comedies were enacted for them. A piñon-jay became bitterly embroiled with a resentful trio of squirrels. A number of his friends arrived in response to his broadcasting and they took his part. The quarrel lasted half an hour with no casualties on either side but with a tremendous output of vituperative shrieks and much angry chippering and much twitching of erected bushy tails.

A morose and self-centered porcupine waddled deliberately across their domain. The misanthrope ignored their presence but appeared to be in a huff over some personal concern of his own, for he kept rattling his spines. He did not pause to nibble on the tree-bark either, and Boone remarked that when

a porcupine wasn't hungry it probably was a sign that he had been terribly upset by something or other. They saw a doe followed by a yearling fawn go tripping along an exposed stretch of the lower trail and stop to browse there; soon, though, something must have alarmed them for they vanished as two swift brown streaks.

For the better part of an hour a pair of eagles made arabesques and swirls up in the blue above them, once volplaning so close they could hear the whistle of the wind through the set pinions. And frequently across the air spaces beneath them a flock of magpies went flashing like a flight of black-and-white arrows. Presumably the preliminary restlessness of the urge for migration had these piebald vagrants, for they bickered and wheeled in an aimless excitement and seemed constantly to be starting somewhere and then, in mid-flight, would change their minds about it. Boone said when finally they did go they would violate all ornithological ethics by journeying eastward instead of southward.

Joan decided his knowledge of nature must be more than cursory—he knew so much about the wilderness dwellers and their habits. He showed her through the glasses a fat badger sunning itself at the doorway of its tunnel. Also with the aid of the glasses, taking turns, they alternately were witnesses

to the unfolding phases of a bloody little melodrama down on the plateau.

A coyote, gliding on his belly from one clump of sage-brush to the next, stalked a half-grown jack-rabbit until he almost was within leaping distance of his silly preoccupied prey. At that precise moment a piratical hawklike bird with a splendid wing-spread—a prairie falcon, Boone pronounced it—shot suddenly down from nowhere at all and struck the poor bunny right out from beneath the coyote's nose. That startled marauder recovered from his disappointment in time to snap at the privateer's hind quarters. There ensued a sensational plunging and flurrying, and then the falcon disengaged itself from the *mêlée* and soared away with empty talons, showing a gap where one of his tail feathers had been snatched out; and the coyote salvaged the disabled rabbit and racked off with it in his mouth, its dragged hind legs spasmodically kicking.

For a proper offset to this murder, a humorist of a venison-bird sailed up and preened himself almost within arm's length of them, cocking his witty eyes at these interlopers upon the privacy of his preserves and ruffling his hackles. Each time Joan tossed him a morsel of bread he carried it away instead of gobbling it down on the spot, which last was what might have been expected from a mendicant of his

greedy aspect, and having stored it in some secret pantry of his own, returned to beg for more. When there was no more to be had he gave the strangers a sharp scolding and departed.

And later on appeared a lady chipmunk with a striped jacket and a ruff about her neck, that came and perched boldly upon Joan's knee and accepted crumbs from Joan's fingers and shoveled them into her jaw pouches for future reference or possibly—so Joan suggested—for family consumption. Either that chipmunk was a glutton or she was a fine provider, but just which did not transpire. Joan chose to give her the benefit of the doubt and praised her for a devoted home body and faithful housewife.

These divertissements by the little people of the mountain by no means formed a continuous performance. They were spaced off, and between them were prolonged intervals when sometimes the two habitants smoked, sitting cross-legged like Turks on the crushed bracken, and sometimes played mumbly-peg, which game invariably began with a showing of great enthusiasm and ended with neither of them winning. And sometimes under a spell of silence they occupied themselves with doing nothing at all.

These interludes of musing came the more often to Joan, while her abstracted fingers plaited grass stems together and her eyes pondered on matters

which she did not see fit to explain—very serious, very debatable matters, too, to judge by her intent expression, but whether her mind brooded upon issues far away or things imminent there was no way of guessing. Meanwhile Boone would be covertly watching her in profile, thinking to himself that she made a picture to hearten and charm, what with her healthy slim body and the admirable set of her cropped head and her sun-browned throat bare above her opened collar; and saying to himself that luck indeed had been mighty kind to bestow upon him in his loneliness so brave and so sweet and so wholesome a comrade as this.

But she was so often preoccupied; not a fault exactly, for in this fellow refugee of his he chose to see no fault or flaw—to him she was altogether bonny—yet it was in a way of speaking a handicap. For within him was arisen a craving to give confidences and to receive them. With impatience he would bide his time until she, emerging from a seemingly not entirely happy reverie, would revert to one of her more customary moods—either a volatile mood for blitheness and teasing raillery or that one which he liked the better: her mood for harkening with a rational balanced gravity to his recounted experiences and his ambitions and his outlook and viewpoint on life and on men and things.

The fact was that the unspoken and not exactly describable understanding which had sprung up between this pair almost from the moment when he championed her forlorn cause was, as to him at least, strengthening itself with each passing hour. He could sense its rise in him. Almost he could feel it as a tangible coil taking its firmer hold on him. He wanted to make this clear to her yet hesitated openly to mention it. So during those periods when her face had lost that look which was so distant and so pensive as to be a look of downright sadness, he talked; and, manlike, he talked then of himself. Let it be understood, though, that there was no boasting in what he said. It merely was that, being a man, the subject of himself was the subject in which he desired to interest the woman in whom he, himself, was interested.

And Joan, when she chose to listen, made a very good listener indeed, wherein she showed a native wisdom; for the trait in a woman of being an attentive and sympathetic listener is a quality attractive to men, since thereby, possibly without their realization of it, they are drawn out and uplifted and inspired.

Take this volatile young Southerner with the sparks of latent heat ready to kindle in his eyes. A hillsman by birth and reared among the hillspeople, he ordinarily was not especially communicative. Besides,

his life as a forest-ranger, which mainly is a solitary life, had enhanced in him this taciturnity. Even as he grew vocal, he subconsciously could marvel at the discovery of his own being reacting under this expansive influence for self-expression and self-revelation.

The day before, and under an identical stimulus, he had spoken somewhat at length about his past, checking the narrative, though, before he reached the chapter dealing with his escapade in Pipestone Cañon. He had told her something of his youthful craving for education and how he was working his way through the state university when the war broke out; how he joined up as a private and later wore the chevrons of a sergeant. He forbore to relate how he had won those chevrons and likewise skipped over the details of a French decoration and a field promotion given for gallantry in action; but he had told how after the armistice and after demobilization he had come home again as a first lieutenant in a machine-gun unit; how he had entered the forestry service and in his leisure in that duty had been studying civil engineering, but six months before, following a play of office politics, had resigned because of friction with a superior whom he regarded as being overly captious and prone to causeless fault-finding; how since then he had been offered a foreman's job

at the Bent Y Ranch and had had the offer under consideration when—

Here he broke off, being mindful of the pledge made between them in their first interview that neither thereafter should refer to the alleged misdeeds which had thrust them together. To span this break in his story she had told him her ambition had been to enter the legal profession. She lately in spare hours had read law books. She hadn't found them dull conning at all; she had enjoyed these stints.

Now, all at once, with no introductory phases, this ex-soldier was speaking of his people. "Those folks down there," he began, "I feel sorry for them. Anybody would, who knew their natures and knew what a desperate struggle they have just to get along and make a living. They get homesick, too, mighty often."

"Why, I should have thought that, being mountaineers, they'd like this country out here?" she hazarded.

"The mountains they came from are different from these. They're smaller, friendlier mountains, full of coves and knobs, with little rivers and shallow creeks—brooks, you'd call them, but we used to call them 'forks' and 'branches'—running between the knobs where the clearings were and the corn patches. And being clannish, they don't mix well with their neigh-

bors out here; that's another thing. They reserve the right to disagree among themselves. In the Civil War they were divided. Even families were divided, some siding with the Union and some with the Confederacy.

"Why, I remember when I was a child there were two cousins of the same name—Jacob Dugmore—both cousins of mine, by the way—who'd fought on opposite sides, and one of them for that reason was known as 'Rebel Jake' and the other as 'Yankee Jake.' But after Appomattox they quit bushwhacking for each other and made up the quarrel and helped drive out the guerrillas who'd preyed on the helpless in both camps while the men-folks were away in the two armies. You'll understand that while they may have their own disputes, in the final analysis our kind band together against outsiders, because as a rule they distrust outsiders. That's what most of them have done since they landed out here—banded together."

"How did they ever come to leave the South and trek out into the Northwest?"

"That's another story," he said, and saying it she noticed how his jaw set in a stiff, resentful block. "Sixteen, seventeen years ago a fever of speculation spread from the lowlands up into the place where they lived. 'Oil rights' and 'coal concessions' and 'timber grants' and 'syndicates' and railroads—the talk was in the air. The country was going to be opened up

and exploited; that was what the promoters, and especially one glib-tongued promoter who as it turned out was the head devil of the outfit—that was what these ‘smart furriners frum the settlements,’ as our people called them, were promising to the ‘hillbillies.’

“Well, my family and all the families round about caught the fever. None of them had much money and a lot of them had never had any money in their whole lives. They couldn’t understand all the language that the strangers used, but they were sure of one thing, and that was that those same strangers were going to make them rich in no time. So they signed papers which some of them couldn’t read, and they signed notes too. They were deeding away their little inheritances; they didn’t know that. Chicanery and fraud and legal technicalities were out of their ken. If they’d guessed that they were being swindled, at least one scoundrel would have been waylaid and shot, feud-style.

“Then the crash came. The crooks had gotten away before that—oh, they knew enough to save their own skins! And the people were left with the bag to hold, saddled with obligations, owing money to the banks—fortunes to them—for debts they had never meant to contract and out of which they’d had nothing back except vain delusions. I suppose the same thing has been done many a time before to credulous,

ignorant folks, but to us, all of us, even the children, it was a terrible disaster.

“Parts of two counties, one lying in Kentucky, the other across the line in Virginia, were depopulated, because, you see, there were foreclosures in the courts, and the sheriffs, very much against their wills, had to dispossess the people from their holdings. They were like strayed sheep—no, not exactly like sheep, because sheep aren’t dangerous. They were crazy with rage and chagrin over losing their homestead where their fathers and their grandfathers before them had been living for more than a hundred years, but they were helpless.

“Well, in the midst of their desperation word came to them somehow that out here homesteaders might take up claims on public lands. They didn’t know what the country would be like. To them it was as far away and as strange as China—yes, farther. But they had to go somewhere, and they had the mountaineer’s yearning for a scrap of land that he can call his own. So they sold their pitiable little belongings and they pooled the money, the more provident helping the needier ones—although for that matter they were all needy enough; and they came West, a whole community of them, camping in smelly day coaches, living on unfamiliar food that disagreed with them—unhappy, anxious men, shy, frightened

women, who had been torn up by their roots, children, babies.

“One baby was born on the train and died there in the night-time and its mother died, too. I was only a half-grown boy then—a cub of a kid—but I’ll not forget the miseries and the horrors of that journey if I live to be a hundred years old. It did something to me, here down inside me.

“And what they found was that!” He waved his arm with a passionate gesture. “That was their Promised Land—desert and sage and mortgages and the jack-rabbits, and the droughts and the alkali. A few of them have prospered after a fashion—Anse Cyphers for one—but only a few. It killed my mother—it literally killed her. She wasn’t well when she started. Inside of a few months she pined away and died. And my father didn’t live much longer than she did.

“He was a real patriarch—tall and straight and high-spirited and charitable and religious. But hospitality was a part of his creed too—it is with most of our breed. In one respect at least he wasn’t like most of the mountaineers because he wanted me—who was his only son, his only living son, I should say—to have the ‘book-l’arnin’,’ as he called it, denied to him in his own youth. I think it was my father who first gave me the ambition to break into college.

He barely could read and write himself—he'd taught himself to do that much, alongside a log fire in a log cabin on winter nights. He was a sort of itinerant preacher, my daddy was. So you see, I'm a minister's son—and I seem to have landed where they say a good many ministers' sons do land!" His jaw locked harder than ever.

"Are many of your people like you?" She asked it at random with a desire to turn his mind into more comfortable channels.

"I suppose so—not in language perhaps but in instincts and sentiments. You see, I've had advantages of a sort and I've lost some of the idioms that they still cling to. For instance if old Anse down yonder were to say to you that there were 'several' people at church this morning he'd not mean eight or ten or a dozen; he'd mean a good-sized crowd, using the word to imply exactly what it meant, I'm told, back in the Elizabethan days. And if he told you he'd heard a gun 'quote' he'd be trying to tell you that the echoes had come reverberating to him—which is what Chaucer might have said under the same circumstances, or Marlowe or Spenser.

"And the homely songs the mothers down there sing to their babies, putting them to sleep, are corrupted versions of old sea-chanteys, old sailors' wives' lullabies about 'Barbary Allen' and 'The Sea-

man's Farewell' that their ancestors sang in Bristol and Bath and Norwich three hundred years ago. They haven't changed much—my race is still a race of frontiersmen who got snared up yonder in the Cumberlandlands when the pathfinders first came through the Gap into the wilderness and they stayed there and they've been there isolated ever since.

"I've strayed away from my earlier teachings but it's still in my blood and my bones—that thrown-back feeling is. I expect if I got very mad or very much excited I'd use obsolete words and curious metaphors that it would be hard even for you, and you an ex-schoolmarm at that, to translate into modern English." He paused for a bit. He had paused numerous times before during the narration, making it episodic and intermittent rather than straightaway.

"Poor Lost Tribe!" It was as though he meditated aloud. "I'd like to do something to help them. . . . I've tried to once—but I blundered—and now . . ."

He left the sentence unfinished and of the colony collectively had no more to say that day or next, except in casual and incidental fashion.

Once, after she had been quiet for quite a long time, she shook her shoulders as though to cast from them a heavy and clinging load and said a rather curious thing—a thing he could not exactly fathom.

"A New England conscience is a terrible thing,"

she said wistfully and apropos apparently of nothing. "It rides you like an Old Man of the Sea. You try to cast it off—but it hangs on. And down in your soul it keeps whispering to you and nagging at you."

"Is something troubling you, Joan?"

"Something is always troubling everyone, isn't it?" she countered. Then added: "That's like a New Englander, too, isn't it—answering one question with another? Let's talk about something else. Lovely weather, isn't it?"

They had finished their lunch—this came much later—and were lolled back on the cushioned earth when the following passage ensued.

Said Boone (after five minutes of contemplative reflection, and blowing of smoke rings): "What character in fiction do I remind you of?"

Said Joan (lying with her head pillowed in her interwoven fingers and staring straight upward): "Robin Hood." Her response had been prompt.

Said he: "No, you're getting warm. Your first two syllables were right. Guess again?"

Said she: "I can't."

"Then I'll tell you—Robinson Crusoe, that's who."

"Why Robinson Crusoe?"

"Why, don't you see the resemblance? Robinson Crusoe's ship was wrecked. Well, figuratively speaking, my ship was wrecked too—last Sunday morning.

And he found himself a castaway on a desert island. If I'm not a castaway, what am I, pray?"

"But this isn't a desert island," she demurred. A wilful perversity seemed to beset her.

"I claim it's most remarkably like one. Here it is, sticking up in the sky just as a rocky island might! It's mostly uncharted, it's unexplorable—parts of it. It's uninhabited, or was. I could think of a dozen similarities if I weren't too busy loafing."

"But your ocean surrounding it?"

"What's that desert down below us but an ocean—the ocean I can't cross? In that respect it's the widest ocean there is. And here's Robinson Crusoe II, cut off from all the world and feeling pretty tolerably blue and lonesome sometimes, what with nobody to talk to except himself, and cooking his own meals and mending his own clothes—or trying to. And then what? Why, just when he's feeling his lonest along come the savages—anyhow along comes one savage—bringing a poor trapped prisoner, all bound, you'll remember. And the prisoner escapes from the cannibal chief."

"No, he didn't either. Crusoe rescued him."

"Have it your own way. At any rate they become fast friends and allies, and they share adventures and dangers together and swear everlasting devotion to each other. And Robinson isn't lonesome any more

—he's cheered and solaced. And eventually they are saved. A ship comes for them and they sail away and then, if I'm not mistaken, the book says that they lived happily ever after, by which, I take it, is meant that they lived together happily ever after. . . .” He glanced at her sidewise; her head was turned away, though. “Wait, I'm not through yet. What does Robinson call his new companion—this companion that he learns in so short a time to grow so fond of?”

“Why, Friday, of course.”

“And why?”

“Because it was on a Friday that he rescued him.”

“Day before yesterday, the day when you and I first met face to face—what day of the week was that? I don't mean now what that day has meant to me, but what its name was on the calendar.”

“Friday. But—”

“The parallel's complete then, as far as it's gone, isn't it?”

“But Friday was black. I'm not black—oh, yes, I must have been—almost black, anyhow. I remember how my face looked next morning when I saw it in that mirror. And my hands, too—with the grime fairly ground into them. But—but Friday was a man.”

“Not in this case. That's the only place where the

two versions disagree. But you'll concede this much—if I'm another Robinson Crusoe you're another Friday. I've got it—you're the Lady Man Friday!"

"I rather like that," she said, sitting up. "I accept the title. As to the responsibilities that go with it—well, fact rarely agrees with fiction, does it now?"

"Fact is stranger than fiction—pardner."

"Pardon me—the word among cultured people is pronounced partner."

"Conceited little Yankee!"

"Deluded big Rebel!"

"A Puritan from Down East!"

"A freebooter from Down South!"

He took the thrust, grinning at her sword-play. "Anyhow you can't deny that you're the Lady Man Friday. There's no getting away from that."

"Are you trying to dictate? In a true socialistic state no one tries to dictate."

"Who said anything about socialism? Sometimes I'm almost an anarchist—or the makings of one. And you are my Lady Man Friday."

"Have it your own way—I'm a Lady Man Friday."

"You bet you are—from now on."

For the rest of the day until time came for them to separate, she to clamber alone to their camp and he, after tarrying for nightfall, to descend the mountain on his appointed errands, Boone did dub her

that. For instance when she had left him on the refuge and was moving off somewhere behind and presumably above him, he, fearing she might be lost, since it seemed to be taking her so long to thread through the labyrinth and emerge into view overhead, shouted out:

“Are you all right, Lady Man Friday?”

To him peering anxiously down from the refuge her voice came back from a point much nearer than he had expected:

“Don’t worry, Robinson—I mean Robin. I—I got a bit bewildered in this Fair Rosamond’s Maze, that’s all. But I’ve just found the way.”

Sure enough a little later she appeared on a craggy scallop higher up and sent a hail down. He looked aloft and saw her eighty or ninety feet above; and, looking very smart and cadet-like, she came to attention, then unbent and waved good-by and called him Robin again and wished for him good luck and a safe return.

He settled down to eat his cold supper and wait for the darkness—doing both these things with the air of a man who is amply content.

Once, waiting there in the thickening twilight, he addressed space, meanwhile ticking off his points on his fingers, like a man summing up:

“You’ve been a pedagogue, so you tell me, but

you're not priggish," he said. "You were well born, as I can tell for myself, but you're not a prude. You can take hardships like a man, and still be all a woman. In short, Joan Powers--and I don't care who hears me say it either--you're a regular peach of a peach of a girl."

XX

Anse Cyphers Goes Climbing

NOT the expectation of a visitor but the bare hope of one—a certain one—kept the lone merchantiser of the Mallard's Nest out of bed long past his hour. As on an earlier occasion, he duplicated his plans for the reception of the person who possibly might come, and who, he trusted, would come—by muffling his windows with scraps of jute, by chocking the crack at his front door-sill with rags, by lighting a lamp to burn with a low flame in his sleeping-quarters.

The tormenting problem which had thwarted this unkempt monopolist for more than two days now was no whit abated with the oncoming of this third night of his speculations. It battered upon him, sending up from the lowermost reservoirs of his being thoughts which were like gushes of some inflammable foul gas, rising to feed the flames of his harassment. He was like a man consumed by a waking fever. If innate depravity is a disease, Anse Cyphers was a desperately sick man. Assuredly he was a man be-

deviled. He would stretch himself on his blankets, and toss there for a bit, peopling his mind with alluring visions, then heave up again and prow about the place with his stocking feet going *thud-thud-thud* against the floor-boards like the pads of a penned animal. For all that the pent air of the kennel was sharp-set with the chill that came through the walls, a heavy sweatiness lay on him.

Along about ten o'clock when the rest of the cove was asleep, his wish was gratified. At his back door the spaced knocks sounded. With a sort of cautious intensity he opened an inch at a time until there was a space for the giver of those signals to insinuate his body.

"Somethin' must 'a' happened to bring you down ag'in so soon," began Cyphers, without greeting or preface. "Whut was it—eh?"

"What could have happened?" sparred Ransom. "No, I dropped down for provisions, that's all; found I was running a little bit low on some lines."

"How come you fur to be runnin' low that-a-way when it's only been three nights sence you packed a full jag up?" demanded Anse.

"Porcupine got into my storeroom and ate part of what was there and dirtied up the rest." The younger man was ready with his explanations—almost too ready, watchful old Anse decided.

"Whut would a quill-pig be a-doin' up thar so nigh to the very topmost? Seems like to me quill-pigs always does their rangin' clos'ter down."

"How can I tell? He got there—that's enough, isn't it?" The dissembler shoved past Cyphers, who craved to press the inquiry. "I'll be picking out and stacking up what I want. You'd better rummage me out another pair of blankets—oh, yes, and a quilt—a thick wadded one."

"Gittin' cold-blooded, ain't you? I calculated you had aplenty beddin' fur yo'self."

"You're full of questions tonight, aren't you?" Ransom seemed nettled. "Still, if you must know, these nights are turning pretty raw. They'll be rawer still in a week from now."

"The blankets is handy, ef you must have 'em, but there ain't no quilts down below here."

"Well, you've got a whole bundle of them in the attic, haven't you? That's where you used to keep them."

"I'll have to climb the step-ladder. 'Twon't be so handy, clamberin' up that thar ladder with a coal-ile lamp. Hadn't you better come along behind and light me whilst I'm lookin'?"

"Certainly not. Why waste time for both of us when I can be doing something else? Here, take my pocket flash-light. I'll use the lamp."

Grumbling to himself, the older man obeyed. He scented a subterfuge, a trick to be rid of him temporarily. It strengthened him in his abiding suspicions. With all possible speed he fulfilled the mission. But the trouble was the attic was so cluttered, so full of obscure recesses and angles. To reach a far corner under the low eaves where sundry spare stocks were stored, he had to move a number of heavy objects. Also there were lashings to be unreefed from about a bale and for that, since with one hand he must hold the electric torch, he was hampered. Beneath his breath he swore venomously as he contended with the stiff knots. He had failed to bring his knife along and he cursed himself for this stupid oversight.

By the time he descended and entered the store, with a gaudy new cotton coverlet over an arm, young Ransom was stowing the last of an assortment of goods in a bag. But before the bag-mouth was closed and tied with twine, Anse Cyphers's eyes, gleaming incandescently in the half-light, caught a flash of certain wrappers and labelings on packages vanishing swiftly. He squinted hard.

"Gittin' kind of a sweet-tooth too, ain't you, nephew?" he asked, striving to make his query casual; he scarce could keep the quiver of eagerness out of his voice. "'Pears like to me you never was

sich a great hand fur dainties before this. Whut's come over you?"

"Maybe I'm getting a taste for a luxury now and then along with the necessities of life, that's all," said the fugitive. "Pass over that quilt; I'll roll it in with the blankets." He fairly wrenched it out of Cyphers's reluctant grasp. "I suppose there's nothing new down here—no change in the situation?"

Anse detected or thought he detected an anxiety on the part of the other to change the subject. He made a mental note of that uneasiness, as he shook his head.

"Ever'thing like it was," he said.

"Fair enough. Then I'll be scooting back up. See you later—if all goes well."

"Hold on—le's talk a little spell." Pawing at the other's coat, Anse sought to detain him. He would have interposed his bulk between the laden youngster and the exit but Ransom was too swift for him.

"Since nothing's happened, what is there to talk about?" he snapped out brusksly, and scrouged by. "Say, come on and let me out, will you please?"

"But whut's your rush, son?"

"I don't enjoy lingering around this neighborhood. It's risky—you know that. Good-by until next time."

On that and with his burdens swung over his back, he was out of the house and flashing across a patch of

moonlight to disappear in the shrubbery along the creek cross-cutting the rear field.

Tarrying only long enough to bar his door, Cyphers hurried into the store. The degenerate's whiskers were bristling, his eyes darting this way and that, his brain was busied with thronging, pregnant questions. Why had his nephew, who usually was so frank and aboveboard, fenced with him? Why should the boy show such haste? He had even forgotten his flash-light, which he would surely need for mounting by the secret trail. With only one stomach to be fed why should so much food be required? And why, in addition to blankets, was a quilt taken as well? Above all, why should the boy carry away jelly in bottles, and sweetmeats and preserved tidbits, even a box of candies? Oh, he had seen those things, slipping so briskly down the maw of that sack.

Wasn't there something else? There was—now he remembered. He had been vaguely aware of it in the first crowded moment or two following his return from the attic. He flung himself behind the small showcase and took swift inventory of a shelf assigned to notions and sundries, crudely displayed there. They were disarranged; some articles were missing. What articles? Ah, a box of scented soap, a card of horn buttons—he had shown that card of

buttons only that afternoon to a girl customer who rejected them—three plated teaspoons and a knife and a fork. What else?

His fingers prowled and probed and searched. There was something else! His meager showing of women's and children's wear, piled upon the end of the counter beyond the showcase, likewise had been invaded. A flannel blouse was gone and a pair of boys' stockings and two sets of undergarments. They had not been sold; penurious Anse knew by heart every item of the merchandise. Neither could they have been pilfered for he had been on hand all day with all his stuffs under his careful miserly eye. There was but one answer, and now beyond possibility of error Anse Cyphers knew that answer. From within his lascivious soul it invited him. It beckoned to him. It set up inside him a craving that was not to be denied.

He had been cheated, that was it. He still was being cheated—and cozened and tricked. From the first he had been denied his proper proportion of the profits derived from the hold-up. What almost was as grievous to endure, he had been refused even a share of knowledge as to its nature and its value. And now when there was a treasure infinitely more delicious than money to be divided he was to be deceived; he was to be flouted; he was to be left out

entirely. Well, he'd see about that, he'd show the young hellion! His teeth clenched on the threat and were ground together until the sound of their gritting filled the little sty.

For the plotting reprobate there was to be no sleep that night. Through its middle hours he paced the floor and his hand kept twitching at his thatched jowls until many wiry hairs were plucked away; and from his throat issued a curious medley—grunts and growls and little mewings. Long before time for him to start he had girded himself for the climb. At the first slit of dawn he was on his way, blundering into bushes, and crashing through them, and bumping against rocks and snarling at impeding low limbs that slapped him in the face, and steadily over and over again mumbling the same filthy words—the frowzy and portentous embodiment of an unsated desire.

XXI

Boone Scores First Blood

LIKE a Snake to the Garden—and a particularly unwholesome-looking snake he made—traveled old Anse, nursing his lust to keep it warm. His impulse—it almost overmastered him, too,—was to dash headlong on when he saw the pyramid of the false peak where it loomed diagonally ahead and near at hand, with the gilt of the newly lifted sun burnishing its eastern facets. By a wrenching effort he forced his legs to creep upward over those few remaining rods of the twisted footway.

But the Eve he sought at that little Eden on the mountain top was nowhere in sight when he entered into it. His sharp quick peering as he passed stealthily through the unbarred gateway told him that much. But she could not be far away; that equally was certain. For there were abundant signs of her; clues proving to him how right he had been in his deductions. On a slab a pair of wool stockings, too small for a man and lately rinsed as their limp dampness proved, were stretched to dry. A boy's slouch hat

was caught on a pine limb, a short belted jacket swinging from the same tree. And on the flat rock by the camp site more metal tableware was racked than any single eater would require. The invader comprehended all these proclamatory details in one fast appraisal.

Beyond the fireplace of smudged stones with its cross-sticks and its blackened pots swinging above the blaze, young Ransom was splitting a log-butt. At the slithering of Cyphers's plodding steps across the disturbed shale the wood-chopper glanced inquiringly over his shoulder. The puzzlement on his face instantaneously was changed to astonishment and to apprehension. He spun on his toes, dropping his ax, his figure in the movement growing taut and nervous. Alarm and challenge and readiness for defense—they all were expressed in his poise.

On his toes he went to meet the approaching one. For this totally unexpected appearance but one plausible explanation had leaped into his mind. Cyphers must have come in the half-darkness preceding day-break, when the signals, if operated, would not be heeded, to bring tidings of some ominous development.

From now on dénouement and climax were to follow in a swift overlapping sequence.

They met, these two, almost breast to breast, with

not three feet to separate them; and there was dread but not fear in the younger man's look, and in the face of the older, a significant greasy smirk.

Cyphers spoke first.

"Son," he said, "whar is she?"

"Who?"

"Son, don't be a-aimin' to soft-soap me. Any hound dawg kin suck aigs but it takes a smarter one than whut you air to hide the shells. Son, whar is she?"

"What rigmarole are you spouting? Where is who?"

"The gal!" The words fairly were spat out. "The purty little gal with the nice gray eyes and the straight little laigs! Son, I've been fooled fur long enough. Fur too long. I've come fur my sheer."

"Assume she is here then." Ransom was casting aside as useless all pretense of deceit. He must temporize, must make terms with this grinning old pervert who had so summarily taken him at this disadvantage—he saw that. "You can figure for yourself how she got here."

"I kin. And I have. Mostly that's whut I've been a-doin' of these three long days 'last past. But not till last night after you wuz gone did I know fur sartain I had you snared in these here two hands of mine—you and her both." He opened and closed

the hands like the claws of a gin. Slaver was dripping down his bearded chin, and where his lips were stretched back from the bluish gums the stained tips of his teeth showed through in an effect of sharp yellow fangs. There was a steamy spume on his face; uncleanness exhaled from him and enveloped him like a miasmic fog. "Son, you ain't toted fair with me. I done yore biddin', I purtected you—but you ain't toted fair. I've clumb this mounting to claim my sheer."

Ransom chose to misinterpret an obvious meaning. He was trying to make his brain say that what so clearly his eyes beheld and his ears heard was not true.

"Uncle Anse," he said, and strove to speak calmly and with seeming good will, "you've got it as it is. I wasn't prepared to tell you—just yet. But now that you know the truth I reckon I'll have to throw myself on your mercy and ask for your help."

"'Tain't fur you to barter and trade—not no more it ain't. I've got the upperences on you now. It's fur me to say, p'int-blank, whut's whut. Looky here." He jerked from his shirt the rolled reward notice and shook it under the other's nose. "Thar's my due-bill and thar's my chattel mortgage. I've got a warrant and I aim fur to collect on it."

"Why, see here, man, suppose there is a reward

offered? Would you have me give her up for the sake of the few miserable dollars you might get from it? What do you take me for?"

"Fur a man growed, like me—a man with a man's feelin's and cravin's the same ez I've got—that's whut I take you fur. I reckon mebber I did steddily some at the fust-off 'bout that price on her purty haid. But not no more! Whar is she, son—in thar? Lemme look at her? That's all I want to do fust—jest look at her fur a spell."

He shoved forward impetuously. A hard hand was pressed against his chest, withholding him.

"Wait a minute." Ransom's voice was beginning to hum with a barely restrained passion.

"Who's the one to say wait or go ahead? Me, that's who 'tis. But I ain't faultin' you now fur whut you done to me, a-tryin' to keep me in the dark. I'm only requirin' of you that frum now on you tote fair, even-stepen."

"Sit down here on this rock and let's talk this thing over." Desperately Ransom fought with his rising hate. "And keep your voice down, please." His uneasy glance went past Cyphers.

"Time fur talkin' is done past; time is come fur somethin' better'n talk. Listen here to me, Boone Ransom. Fixed the way things air, I could ast fur all, but I ain't hoggish. A feller can't have ever'-

thing fur hisself in this world. So I ain't claimin' full possession. Sheer and sheer alike from now on ---that's all I ast. Ain't that a fair square offer? You've had her fust; I ain't quarrelin' with that. You had yore chanct and manlike, you tuck it. But now and frum now on I'm in on the deal."

"You've said enough and more than enough. Go!"

"I've said my say, but I ain't had my way."

"Go, I tell you. Go and do your damnedest, if you choose to, after you get down off this mountain. But go!"

"Not till I've—" He bent forward, his lips close to the other's ear and, whispering, he ended the sentence. He just did finish it.

"You dirty beast!" With a tremendous flat-handed slap Ransom wiped the leer off that lecherous face. "You misbegotten feist!"

The blow staggered Cyphers back six feet or more. He rocked and teetered on his heels, recovered, jerked a knife from a pocket, flitted it open with his thumb and, giving a low hoarse bellow of rage, he bore in toward his adversary.

He had never a chance. As well might he have wrestled with a whirlwind. Ransom was on him and all over him. He was pounded, squeezed, choked, overthrown. A stamping boot-heel was ground against the clenched hand that held the knife, making

red pulp of his fingers. Disarmed, disabled, he spraddled on the rocky earth and, storming, Ransom flung himself down upon him, with both knees in his paunch, and throttled him and hammered his skull against the stones.

The desire to kill, moreover to kill after that sweetest fashion of murder—with his bare hands—was on the younger man. He would wring that hairy neck but first he would worry that mangled face out of all fleshly semblance. He uttered deep growling, sobbing sounds like a dog gripping another dog.

There penetrated into his frenzy, shrill pleading words. Closer and more loudly the outcry was repeated, and with that the surge of Boone Ransom's madness receded in him and his brain cleared. Slowly and unwillingly, like a man loath to abandon a welcome task that is no more than half done, he lifted himself from the feebly writhing shape and stood back, his fingers crooked and all in motion like living grapples, and his eyes in the splotchy white-and-red mask of his face like two narrowed disks of a corrosive brown acid from which live sparks seemed to jet, until his vanquished foe could get upon his tottering feet and drag himself away.

Slipping and falling and getting up again and stumbling blindly, Cyphers made for the exit. Reaching it he looked back. There was no expression on

his disfigured face. It was all one spurting soppy smear. But there was no mistaking the deadly purport of the farewell gesture he made with his dripping right hand.

He staggered out between the lintels of the rim-rock, and Ransom shook himself as though to clear his head of heavy fumes and withdrew his pin-pointed stare from the spot where the victim had vanished, to face the widened angry eyes of the girl for whose sake he so ruthlessly had wrought this damage.

XXII

Those Handcuffs Again

JOAN, an hour after breakfast, was emerging, in a great splatter of flirled drops, from her icy little pool below the brow. She had waited through the interval prescribed by hygienic experts as a proper measure of time between a meal and a bath. She was glad she had waited that long; almost sorry she had not waited even longer and given the sun a chance to take more of the chill off the water. She had uttered one involuntary little shriek as it closed over her shrinking shoulders. She had bounded out again with a splash and a shudder.

By contrast the air seemed almost warm to her where she stood on a rock rubbing herself with a thick coarse towel and contending with an inclination on the part of her teeth to chatter. Having by dint of friction brought a glowing throb to body and limbs, she dressed herself, feeling grateful for fresh garments next her skin and for her new pair of stockings and her clean blouse of woollen. She draped the towel over a limb, left her soap in a little stone niche

and came brushing through the spiny green trappings of the short byway. She was humming a cheerful catch—the half-remembered scrap of chorus from some popular song or other.

Back where the path joined the corkscrewed trail, she quit singing and halted, her lips parted and ears strained. Had she heard sounds as of crossing voices and of struggling there inside the compound? Surely she had been mistaken! No, she wasn't—she had heard it, was hearing it now, intensified and violent.

With a flurry of surprise upon her, she bounded up and on through the entrance and froze there, momentarily transfixed by the shock of what she saw.

She saw Boone kneeling upon the flattened belly of someone—it was a human being, she could tell that much at least. She saw his busy fingers kneading the hapless victim's throat as a baker kneads the dough, next saw his fists pestle the face of the prostrate one, braising the features. She saw red clots flying, and the thresh and the heave of the interlocked bodies, and heard pants and oaths and the thudding of knuckles on bruised flesh—all the bestial accompaniments of a relentless barehanded battle. And she realized that this was a pitiless grapple to a finish. There was stark murder in it.

"Oh, don't, don't!" She screamed it. "Boone, for God's sake stop—you're killing him!"

She darted forward, repeating the entreaty, and with that Boone hesitated and threw his head back and tossed it like a swimmer arising from a dive into great depths. She swerved aside to be out of the orbit of the fight and stayed there while Boone was getting upon his own feet and while the beaten man, twisting and flapping like a crippled snake, got upon his and tottered away, groping as he went and quaking all over with hard rigors, a wofully mishandled and most piteous spectacle.

He reeled by her so close that she might have touched him. He did not see her; his eyes were full of blood spurting down from his split scalp, and he retched and gagged on the bloody foam rising in his throat. But for all that his face was a monstrous red blur she made sure she recognized him. He looked back once and made a sinister sort of motion with one arm and then was gone, and Joan confronted the victor of this one-sided combat.

Distress, compassion, disgust, revulsion—these were the emotions uppermost in her. For she had seen her cavalier transformed into a merciless bully. It almost made her sick. It did make her, for the time being, shrewish. It brought the pedagogue out in her. She eyed him as a mentor might eye a culprit taken in the commission of some inexcusable outrage. Unbalanced as she was by her disappointment,

she wanted to storm at him. What she did, in his present frame of temper, was as ill-advised. She berated him, and tarrying for no explanations she openly charged him with wanton cruelty while he stood before her with the dulled, dazed expression of a man who has been in a trance.

"Oh, how could you be so brutal!" she cried out, and stamped with her foot. "It was unforgivable, horrible. It was revolting. To do what you just did to a man old enough to be your father, a man not half your equal in strength—what excuse is there?"

He attempted to make none. He only kept staring fixedly at her. She scolded on:

"That poor wretch—isn't he the man you call uncle? Yes, he is. I knew him. The one who has been protecting you, who has been watching day and night to notify you if those men below this mountain made any move against you—you told me that a dozen times! You praised him to me—at least you praised his vigilance and his devotion. No longer ago than yesterday you admitted that you owed your very security to him. What possessed you to turn against him? What changed you into a thug?"

Still he offered no extenuation. Had not her own vision been clouded by indignation she might have detected how under his mounting sulkiness her accusations were cutting him.

"Why, look at you!" she went on. "You, with not a mark on you. And he half dead. You match yourself against an older, weaker man, you knock him down and then with him stretched helpless on the ground you set in to slaughter him."

"I did do just that," he admitted. "And I'm damned sorry you interrupted me before the job was finished."

"Who struck the first blow?"

"I did. I struck the first blow and the last one. I struck all the blows that were dealt."

As his greater passion ebbed, a different temper rose in him under the spur of these tauntings. It was a perverse temper, making him surly and terribly resentful. Since she chose to take his opponent's side stubborn pride would not permit him to speak in palliation.

"But why? What brought him up here to you?"

"That's his business." He said it curtly from between locking teeth.

"And why did you assault him?"

"That's my business."

"What did he do to you?"

"Nothing, if you put it that way."

"Then what did he say to you?"

"That—if you'll pardon me—is none of your business."

"Then you have no defense whatever to make for your attack on him or for your treatment of him when he was lying helpless?"

"Absolutely none, Miss Powers." Voice and manner were both freighted with a cold, sullen defiance.

"Let me understand!" For poor unseeing Joan it was a grievous pity that the lingering inhibitions of a schoolmistress should at this critical pass in their affairs beset her. "You admit that you took the offensive, and you admit that you showed him no mercy and that you feel no repentance for what you have done, and you probably will be equally ready to admit that by beating him you have made an enemy of the one person we sorely need for a friend and an ally?"

"You state the case very concisely but very clearly, Miss Powers. Your training for the law has not been wasted."

His sarcasm added to her own hurts. But she pressed her point, never realizing that her biased judgment was making of her inquisitor and jury as well.

"And still, in spite of all that, when I, as your partner in this enterprise, ask you civilly as I can, considering my feelings, what cause you have for quarreling with him and beating him, you tell me in so many words that it is none of my business."

"Again let me congratulate you on your accuracy in summing up."

"Very well. Then I suppose there's nothing more to be said on the subject?"

"In view of the position you have taken I can think of nothing else."

"Or on any other subject?"

"That is for you to decide. With whatever you do decide I am quite content."

He bowed, then showed her the broad of his back and stalked away. He circled the hut and passed under the overhang of the lean-to behind it. Immediately he was out, cramming into his pockets a carton of crackers and a small tin of pressed beef. Passing her without apparent heed for her presence, he collected his rifle, his field-glasses and his revolver and made for the outlet. Irresolution, in which a regret for being overhasty was a factor, had through this interlude held her apathetic. Now, her wits being sharpened by the evidences of his intention to depart without taking her, she came to a definite agreement with herself.

"Wait, please," she called out rather faintly.

He waited, but with an unfeigned reluctance.

"Surely," she began, as she neared him, "surely the time has come for us to part company? You have been very kind to me, though, these three days and

I appreciate it and thank you for it. But I came to you as an unbidden guest on sufferance, and I don't want to be a charge upon you and your bounty any longer—not in view of this—this misunderstanding.”

“So?” He eyed her non-committally from under his lowering brows. “What would you like to do then?”

“I'd like to go.”

“Go where?”

“Go down this mountain—go all by myself, if you don't mind. I promise you that when I get to the bottom and meet those men who are down there—Clyde and the sheriff and the rest of them—I'll do nothing or say nothing which will jeopardize your chances in any way whatsoever. That's as little as I can do in return for your kindness. But I do want to go. Can't I go?”

Since he had been mute thus far regarding the motives behind his wrecking of Cyphers, he could not and would not now tell her why he did not dare suffer her, alone, to follow upon the heels of that battered creature.

“No,” he countermanded, as though addressing a spoiled and unreasonable child. “No, you can't go. You'll stay here until I give the word for you to depart.”

“When will that be?”

"In my own good time."

"But you are deserting me yourself. Am I to be left here alone all day?"

"Won't my absence be more welcome than my company would be?" His lips tightened under the strain of his repression.

"That's not the question. What is to prevent my going down after you leave?"

"Because I forbid it. Because I'll be watching the trail behind me. Because if you try it I'll intercept you and bring you back by main force if necessary. Is that sufficient?"

She made an open-palmed admission of her helplessness.

"Then I'm your prisoner?"

"You might put it that way. Anyhow you are powerless to make a move without my consent."

"I suppose I must submit—there being nothing else for me to do." All at once an added finality of purpose took possession of her. "But I warn you that you may rue this."

"Whatever other things I may have to rue, this I'm sure will not be one of them." Here no longer was the gallant squire of dames who had ministered to her wants and her whims. In him she beheld only a spiteful inflexible jailer. This she beheld and behind this the newly roused possibility of something more des-

picable, something infinitely more to be dreaded. For Joan let it be said here that she was in no fit frame for a rational weighing of facts and motives. Her jangled nerves played a lying tune on her suddenly warped mind, and the refrain of that tune was a hideous question which gathered and formed in her mind and fortified her for execution of the design to which now she unalterably was committed. She turned away from him, unaware of the haggard yearning in the long look he focused upon her retreating figure; and she went over and absently raked with her toe at a blazing chunk which had escaped from the fireplace.

All day at his customary place of vigil Ransom gloomed, not forgetting though to harken for betraying signs or sounds from above him, nor with a tripled vigilance to watch both the trails below him—his own trail as it wound under the nearer cornice of his sentry-post, since he no longer had dependence upon Cyphers for warning of danger from the besiegers, and likewise the known trail where twice it shoved a curving length out of the green panoply on the slants farther down. He must risk no chances whatsoever, for from three quarters his resourcefulness was challenged: by the rebellious Joan up yonder, did she dare to disobey him, and by Cyphers—although,

knowing Cyphers, he did not greatly fear from him attack in broad day nor yet a deliberate betrayal—and finally by the possemen. But had it been these last who advanced he was not sure that he would not have welcomed them, ready to trade his own freedom for Joan's security. The alternatives were not offered to him, though. So all day he gloomed and he watched, and all day was racked and harrowed by a constantly growing sense of his responsibilities.

And all day, too, Joan gloomed about little Fort Defiance and was acutely unhappy. To her it seemed the longest, the most miserable day that ever had been or that conceivably ever would be. Through most of those interminably dragged-out hours her hands were idle. Still, since she irrevocably had reached her conclusions, there were things to be planned—small things but important. She planned them, performed such of them as might be performed in advance of the culminating event.

And at evening when the unregarded halos of the sunset were making a molten pool of glory in the recess behind the rounding rim-rock he returned, to be met, though, with no hail or greeting. Within arm's reach of each other and yet leagues remote, they supped in a dour silence while the sombrous shadows beyond the nimbus of their fire thickened and deepened to match the joyless thoughts of both of them.

There was for these two, in the harsh quick matter of this feud of theirs, a special psychology operative. That sharing in a joint communion of common dangers, that mutuality of their interests which from that Friday afternoon to this Monday morning had welded their natures more potently together than weeks or months of ordinary unsiced companionship might have done for an even more susceptible pair of normal young people, was now by reason of the rude sundering of the ties between them producing an effect inversely as intense.

The romance, the more-than-implied romance, had gone out of the drama, and the drama in this act had become tragic, and through the natural law of opposites they were being forced farther apart—or so to the actors themselves it seemed—than if their acquaintance had been casual, their association commonplace and unpicturesque.

When supper was over she washed the dishes and dried them, he smoking moodily. His posture bespoke lassitude as though all his wonted spring and enthusiasm had escaped out of his frame, leaving him flaccid and dispirited. A forlorn hush followed. She broke it.

“Good night,” was all she said.

“Good night,” came from the downcast figure hunched there on an upturned log end.

Next there was a candle-light shining through the tiny orifice of the window. Five minutes later that was extinguished, and then across the brooding silence he heard the cross-beam jarring into its grooves on the inner side of the door. It was the first time she had barred it. The small rattling, thumping disturbance the timber made was emblematic of the cleavage in their former relationship, a token of the estrangement now so firmly impressed.

He waited, where he sat, scarcely stirring for half an hour, three-quarters, until he figured she should be asleep. Then he made his own preparations, moving very quietly.

The orifice where the ramp was had been closed and the racked-up barrier of the slabs reinforced with the bristly dead pine top. He had done those things on his arrival; not much more remained to be done.

From the shed behind the cabin he brought two of his blankets. With one of them he upholstered a place for himself among the exposed roots of a smallish, wind-blown tree imbedded in a cleft beneath that long coffin-shaped stone which served for dining table and settee. The trunk skewed at a gentle angle; some of its root-work was spread, basket-like, on the rock; the rest ran down in tentacles under the shelving tip to find earth and moisture somewhere in the subterranean seams.

From past experience he knew this rustic cranny, being cushioned, would make for him a fairly comfortable resting-place. It was a favorite perch of Joan's; she had called it her armchair. His back would be against the slanted bole and the folded thicknesses of the padding under him. Nor need he dangle his legs, for a stool also was provided. A conveniently up-edged stratum of shale made a natural foothold. With a second blanket over his shoulders he figured he should be quite warm since he meant to keep the adjacent fire burning strongly. Moreover, for strategic reasons the nooked corner had a final advantage. Sitting there he faced the barricaded entrance, the hut being almost directly behind him.

He laid his rifle, loaded of course, and with the barrel pointing away from him, upon the flat of the rock within arm's reach; his service revolver was placed alongside the rifle. Now let him feed the blaze and he was ready. He fed it until the flames eddied and roared, and on small stones hard by, where its contents would keep hot, he balanced the filled coffee-pot, and then he settled in among the roots for the beginning of an all-night watch.

For of this much at least Boone Ransom was sure. Sooner or later Anse Cyphers would return, armed and eager for reprisals. He knew full well what thoughts must fill the malign soul of that enemy for,

by book, chapter and verse, he knew this one with whom he must deal. Two dominating lures would bring old Anse—desire for blood-vengeance upon him and, stronger still, the craving to possess that girl yonder.

Anse's prior design—it was as though Boone could read the other's mind—would be to destroy him. And then, did he succeed at that undertaking, then . . . Even now the whiskered miscreant might be squatted near at hand, biding his chance to steal up for a surprise assault in the darkness. What was a more probable contingency, he would come tomorrow morning with the first flares of sun-up. But sooner or later he would come. So for this night Boone dared not sleep. As for tomorrow night, should the suspense be prolonged until then—well, tomorrow night must take care of itself.

The night wore on, a clear windless night of bright stars. Midnight came and the moon was sinking. He drank a tin cup of the black coffee and replenished the fire and went back to his blanketed seat, yawning and stretching and with a gritty feeling under his eyelids as though fine sandy particles had lodged there.

It came on to be two o'clock and to be three. It was four o'clock now. His head kept lolling forward, heavy and drowsy. He would jerk it up with an ef-

fort. His shoulders drooped. The coffee-pot was empty. He had drained it two hours past midnight. On the night before, his journey down the mountain had kept him until very late. Through all the day before, anxiety and sorrow for the quarrel and a sense of his predicament—and hers—had frayed his nerves. And now this night—it would last forever, it seemed.

Boone Ransom was a very weary, very sleepy young man. He slid farther down into the roots, his arms hanging laxly and brushing the tree trunk. They were like two pendulums of a clock that is about to run down. The fire was flickering low. In a few minutes he would put wood upon it. But not just yet. He'd postpone that task for a little while. . . .

There had been little sleep for the second watcher here on the peak. For, all unknown to him, there was a second watcher. Fully dressed, Joan had taken short cat-naps, rousing after each of these to creep across the earthen floor and from her tiny window peep surreptitiously at the recumbent figure at the foot of the tree, where the firelight outlined it.

She was perplexed that he should remain so persistently on this sentinel duty. What did this wakefulness mean? Wherein did it concern her? For surely it must concern her. She measured one factor against another—his proprietorial air toward her be-

fore their dispute, his jailer-like behavior since—and the sum total of Joan's arithmetic was that she became more firmly dedicated than ever to the design set for her hands. She might have vacillated before yesterday, swaying between this pull and that, but now she was adamant. Yet there was abundant grieving within her for what she meant to do.

It was nearly six o'clock now. The fire was a fire no longer but a mass of fluffy, dully glowing ashes and charred ends of sticks. Beyond the nape of the false peak the dawn was bright against the heavens and there was a soft reddish glowing on the camp-ground. One by one the stars winked out.

Across the camp-ground from the cautiously unbarred door of the cabin came Joan, gliding on her toes and carrying in her hands a thing which in the palish light glinted like tarnished pewter. She crept up behind the pine. The form slumped against it did not stir. She was close enough to touch him. She did. She stooped, each movement governed by infinite care, and she took first one and then the other pendent arm of the slumbering man and guided them back, back, until his inert hands almost met on her side of the tree. He shrugged but he did not wake. She adjusted the handcuffs, pressed them in, locked them fast. Still he did not waken.

She came from the shelter of the tree, took the

pistol from the rock, held it muzzle upward and, as quickly as her finger could press the trigger, fired all five of the shells in its cylinder.

So now, to this swift racketing volley, the sleeper awoke. With a convulsive twist of the body he struggled upon his feet, the stretched chain between his pinioned wrists rasping on the bark, and with startled and as yet uncomprehending eyes this young Samson in the toils stared at his Delilah and she gazed back at him, and in her gray eyes was neither pleasure nor gloating but only a very great pity.

XXIII

Joan Finds Out a Number of Things

IN a sort of stupefaction Boone Ransom squinted and blinked. Then slowly he twisted his head over his shoulder and, glancing downward, saw how he was staked and with what manner of bonds. The daze left him. Very deliberately and quietly, like one having but slight interest in this outcome, he faced her again.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Joan Powers. At least I haven't lied to you there."

"I mean what are you? I reckon the question is superfluous though. I can guess." There was a steely contempt in the speech. Before it Joan quailed just a trifle.

"I'm the person who was sent in here to outwit you and capture you, if I could. No, I wasn't sent either—I volunteered for the job."

"Oh, so you volunteered?"

"Let me explain." She blurted out the sequence swiftly. "Julian Clyde is my half-brother—we are

orphans. We came out West together from New England four years ago. He had been in the government secret service. He liked the game. He opened a private detective agency up in Portland. I helped him; I acted as his secretary—I did some field work too. The adventure of it appealed to me as it did to him. His business has been struggling along, not doing very well. It was hard for him to get a foothold. And I so wanted him to go ahead and succeed—he's splendid and he's honest and I love him very dearly. We've been everything to each other.

“Well, he was called in on your—your case. He came down here and looked the ground over and then hurried back to the office and took me into consultation with him. He asked my advice. The situation was difficult and delicate, as he estimated it and as I realized after he outlined it. He told me what he had learned about you—your reputation before you got into this scrape and all. He told me also he was quite sure—in fact he'd established it to his own satisfaction pretty conclusively—that you were in communication with someone at the foot of the mountain—Cyphers, he thought. And he was certain that you had some means of access to the cove other than by traveling the regular path, and that you must be traveling it frequently. Indeed he felt convinced that he had stumbled upon the secret of your private trail.

He believed you had an observation post somewhere above too. He wanted to catch you. To do that would be a great feather in his cap; besides, there was the reward. But he didn't want to run the chance of killing you or of being killed himself—not that he's a coward. Even you can understand what it all meant to him. But you were so safely entrenched; all the advantage was on your side, as I saw for myself when he'd explained the physical surroundings.

"An idea came to me. He called it a splendid one. Even so he was loath at first to let me try it—the risk and all. I made him see there was no risk or very little. I would pose as a fugitive from justice myself and drive through this section, letting myself be seen. He would follow and overtake me and go through the pretense of arresting me. Then, just under where he figured your trail descended, I would escape from him and run away up this mountainside, trusting that my path would cross yours and that you would sympathize with me and perhaps give me shelter, or in any event give me a clue to your hiding-place.

"If I failed to meet you I could easily make my way back to the Mallard's Nest and go through the form of surrendering myself to him. He would start with me back to the railroad, release me somewhere en route and I'd return to the city with no one the wiser. That was the scheme we decided on.

“So we tried it. That next day he had the reward notices printed and brought them along with him, and as a part of the subterfuge he left one with Cyphers, hoping you would see it or at least hear of it. Well, is that enough?”

“That,” he stated, “is more than enough. A sweet little plan—simple but amply sufficient for outwitting a simpleton. I was to be hoodwinked, beguiled, deceived, trapped—oh, there are so many pleasant words that describe the whole admirable thing. If I were fool enough to accept you at your seeming face value—and I was just such a fool—and if I were to try to help you, then in return you would repay me by treachery—as you have. May I congratulate you?”

“But don’t you see—when I entered into this thing I had never seen you, I had no idea of what you really were like at heart, I—”

“But now you know, don’t you? A fool—a blind deluded fool. And the handcuffs—this same pair that I’m wearing now—they were part of the system too? You wore them in order to arouse my compassion, to work on my sentimental side?”

It was as though he were a prosecutor and she the defendant under arraignment. Before his accusing eyes her own shamed and evading ones dropped as she nodded in confirmation of the charge.

"And you could have taken them off whenever you pleased—is that right?"

She nodded once more.

"I had the key—have had it constantly. It's on a string around my neck," she confessed, her head down.

"But then of course you had another purpose in bringing them along, didn't you?—I must give you credit for that astute device too. If the opening came, say when I was asleep or off guard or when I had been cajoled into carelessness—you would use them on me as you have, eh, Miss Joan Powers, volunteer detective?"

"I—I won't—I can't deny it."

"Very effectively done! And you came armed for me, I suppose, in case of emergencies?"

"Yes, I had a pistol—a little automatic. But I lost it out of my pocket that first day."

"How regrettable that in one regard your perfect plans and specifications should have gone astray! Still, as it turned out, you didn't need your gun. You borrowed mine, I observe, while I was asleep. And those shots you just fired—might I ask if they were meant for your dear brother—as a signal to him that the prize idiot of all the world was trussed up like a chicken and all ready for delivery to him?"

A third nod.

"And I called you my Lady Man Friday." He said it with a terrible bitterness. "I was wrong there as well. Trust a fool to be wrong always. Why, you're a sort of she-Judas, aren't you?"

To this she gave no answer other than to make an involuntary gesture as though with her hands to close her ears against his tauntings. He went on:

"To sum it all up then, the little affair resolves into this: from the moment of our first meeting you have been playing a part. You have been waiting—I'm not boring you, am I?—you have been waiting and watching, have been shrewdly, wisely, cold-bloodedly biding your opportunity to take me at a disadvantage and—"

"Stop!" she cried out. "Stop and listen to me for one minute. That's not the truth. The truth is—believe it or not, and I could not blame you if you refuse—the truth is that within half an hour after you found me I was beginning to repent of the artifice I had helped to concoct. It became hateful to me. I hated myself for entering into it. You were so good, so kind, so brotherly!

"I reasoned it all out—on one side my obligation to Julian and his interests, my promise to help him, the fact that of my own volition I had committed myself to this undertaking, the fact that he was counting upon me to go through with it; and on the other side

—you and you only. Night before last when I was here alone I came to a decision. And that decision was that I'd not betray you. I made up my mind that I would confess everything—beg your forgiveness and offer you my help—offer to intercede for you. But I kept putting it off. I was so afraid you would despise me.

“Then yesterday—only yesterday morning—you showed me another side of your nature; and that was when for some caprice or for some private reason of your own—I can only take the worse view of this since you decline to tell what your pretext was—you almost killed your best friend, a feeble old man thirty or forty years older than you are. Then and there you marred for me the conception of you which I had built up in my heart—yes, you spoiled it. You seemed so ruthless, so remorseless, so bloodthirsty.

“Even after that, had you let me go as I begged you to do, I was resolved not to injure your chances in any possible respect. I meant only to slip away from here and try to forget the horrid part and remember only the happier parts of this experience. I could have explained to Julian; I meant to try to persuade him to give up his efforts to arrest you. But you wouldn't let me go. All of a sudden you treated me as though I were your chattel to be done with as you pleased, and at your pleasure—as though you were my master.

I got afraid. So I went back to my original purpose—and I have won!”

If she had designed to put a note of exultance into this last declaration the result was failure, flat and dismal failure. She shrank, she fairly cowered before his silent, his scornful, his inflexible condemnation of her.

The silence endured until she felt she must scream out or go into hysteria or run away and hide—do something, do anything to break the tension. If even now he would beg for release or offer her an explanation, no matter how lame or how lacking in plausibility, to account for his recent attitude; if he did no more than abase himself before her, by that alone she knew she would be forced to bestow upon him the mercy she longed so poignantly to bestow. He did nothing, though, through a long minute except to look steadily and sternly upon her.

At length he said:

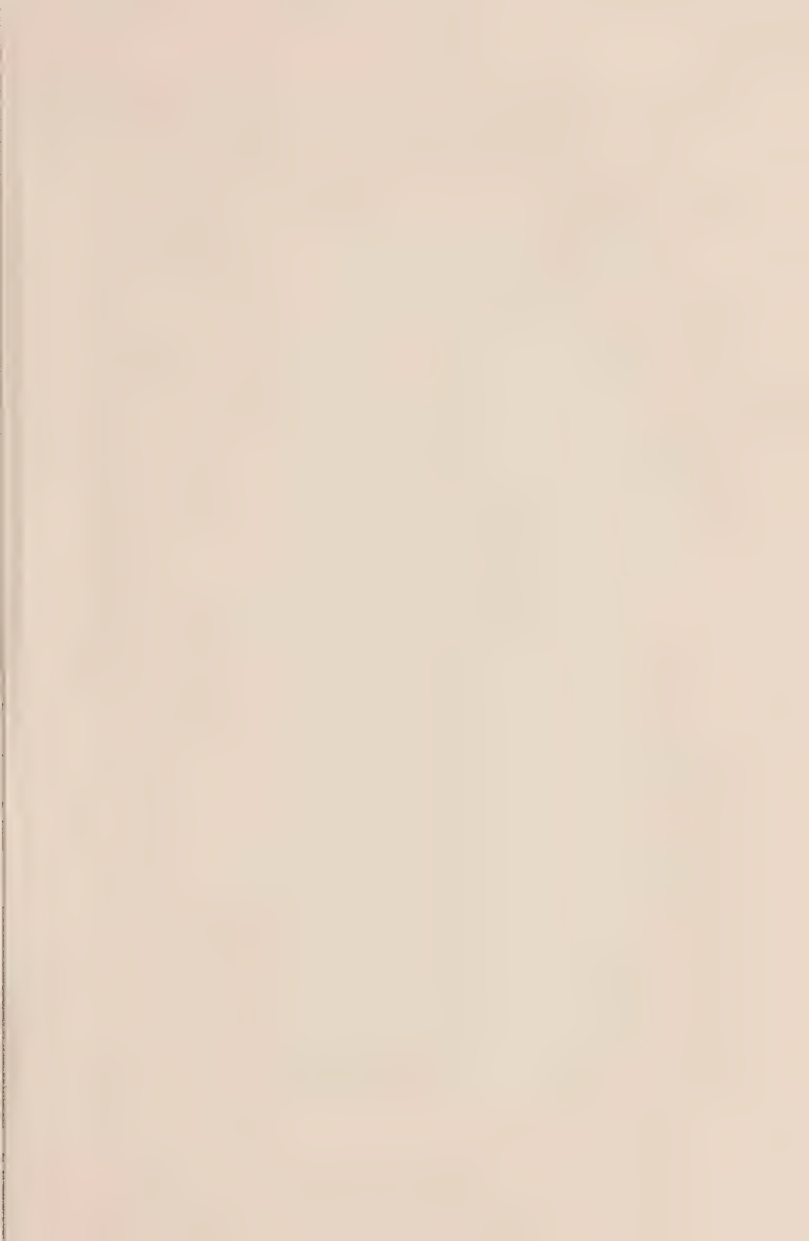
“Your confederate—he was to start up immediately he heard your shots fired?”

“Yes, that was agreed on—five shots, close together.”

“And probably he will be bringing his men with him to help handle such a dangerous outlaw?”

“Yes—the sheriff too, I think.”

“I hope they get here soon!”





"YOU treated me as though I were your d."



be done with as you pleased," said Joan.

She thought he dreaded the prolonged discomfort of being bound fast to this tree, his twisted arms caught behind him, his head scraping the rough bark. Compassion filled her so that she choked up. Had she been in a fit state to note details she would have seen how all at once his eyes had gone past her toward the blocked entryway.

"You shouldn't forget," he said next, "that your job is only half completed with capturing me. There're the stolen goods, you know—you mustn't overlook them. You'll remember that winning the full reward is contingent on your recovering the swag. Allow me to help you; you'll find it, all intact, tucked under the bottom layer of boughs at the foot of the bed that you've slept on these last four nights. Perhaps you'd better make sure of it."

So offensive yet so authoritative was his tone that instinctively she found herself obeying the suggestion. She went speedily, and as speedily returned, her hands filled with crowded manila envelops and a flat, long leather wallet.

"You'd better open them up and examine what's inside," he bade her.

She burst out then:

"Oh, do you think I want to paw through this—this stuff—before your eyes! Can't that part of it wait?"

"As a conscientious amateur detective I think it's your duty to go through the evidence. Judas probably counted his thirty pieces of silver. I'd follow his precedent, if I were you."

Stung by the gibe, she dropped to her knees, undid the wrappers, shook out the contents and shuffled through them.

"The money—it doesn't seem to be here?" she said, puzzled.

"For a very good reason—it never was there."

"Never was there!" She echoed it blankly.

"There wasn't any money at all, not a cent."

"But why then should—"

The question was destined not to be concluded. A sense of a great tenseness in his posture made her pivot on one knee and look where he was staring.

Above the barricade yonder a human head slowly and discreetly was rising into her sight—first, a scalp so pasted together and so plastered down with dried blood from raw undressed wounds that it was like a dun-colored skullcap; then a face, a distorted swollen gargoyle of a face, its nose enormously distended, its mouth a wide crease under the hairy lip; a neck craning; a pair of hunched shoulders; a clawing hand—and now the black barrel of a gun lifting.

The eyes that blazed from between the puffed, discolored lids in that face were fixed devouringly on

the two of them, shifting from Joan to Ransom, from Ransom back to Joan. At that distance she could see them stretching in a glare of delighted understanding. To a roar of exultation from Cyphers the gun muzzle was swung down, the stock leaped into view and was cuddled against its bearer's shoulder. And in that same fraction of a split second Joan was on her feet and had thrown herself between the living target and the huntsman, her arms outstretched protectingly.

"Get from in front of me—he'll shoot you!" Ransom was crying wildly and straining at his fastenings. "You damned little fool, get away from here!" He tried to shove her aside with his flexed knees, then in his desperation kicked at her. One booted toe grazed her ankle, numbing it, but in the midst of that direful extremity the pain was grateful to her. For now intuitively she knew—how much and how well she knew!

And through this the leveled gun was veering an inch this way, an inch that way, as Anse Cyphers tried for his aim past her; and Ransom was twisting his torso drawn forward, his lower limbs threshing and thumping impotently.

The rifle barrel reared up—a moment of grace vouchsafed.

"So that's how it is!" whooped Cyphers triumphantly. "Well then, you purty thing, I ain't takin'

no chances on borin' you. Jest wait a minute fur me, little honey-bird!" His head vanished.

"He's flanking you!" panted Ransom. "Take my pistol—no, it's empty! My rifle then—can you handle it?"

She caught up the repeater, her hands, in a frenzy of horror, fumbling and snatching at its unfamiliar mechanism.

"Shoot him—shoot to kill—it's your only hope! Keep shooting," implored Boone. "And if you miss, save one bullet for yourself. Don't let him touch you. Swear it!"

"I swear it," she answered, and meant it. She remembered then the key to the cuffs and grasped convulsively with one hand for the cord about her neck but a warning from Boone, "There he is again—there to your right!" whirled her about to behold Cyphers at a point on the crown twenty feet from where she had seen him before. He had edged along the narrow, jagged projection on the outer side to try for an enfilading shot. But now he tossed his rifle over so that it clattered on the rocks within.

"Cut loose, my purty!" he raved, and heaved himself up bodily, balancing half in, half out of the enclosure. "The bullet ain't molded whut kin stop me now. Fust you, at my pleasure—then him to work on with my bare hands!"

She flung up her own weapon. Afterwards she was to have no recollection of pointing it or of having worked the trigger action. She did not even hear the crashing report. She was cognizant only of a hideous shuddering shriek, dying out as abruptly as it had begun. And where the teetering enemy had been was no one.

"Now that," Ransom was saying from behind her, and his voice was singularly cool and satisfied and reassuring, "that is what I would call a remarkably good job."

"Did I kill him?" she heard herself asking distractedly. "Oh, did I kill him?"

"You didn't even crease him. Your shot struck the rock though—threw splinters in his face, I think. He jerked aside—I saw all of it—and slipped off backwards and fell."

"I'm glad I didn't kill him." Her shaky voice seemed to be coming back to her from some long way.

"I'm glad the vermin's dead!" said Boone. "Would you mind letting me loose until I can go and see just exactly what's happened? I promise not to try to escape; I'll still be your prisoner—forever!" He uttered the last word under his breath.

She put the rifle aside. She faced him and she was all in a tremor.

"Boone Ransom," she said, very humbly, very con-

trutely, "I understand now. I heard what he—oh, that villainous beast—I heard what he said. But even if I hadn't heard I would have known—his face! So that was why he came yesterday at this time, that was why you fought him, that was why you tried to stay awake all through this night—to save me?"

"Yes," he said, "that was why."

"But you didn't tell me. If you had—"

"You didn't give me a chance."

"Boone Ransom," she declared, "while you can't get away from me, I'm going to kiss you."

Full on the mouth she kissed him.

"I could manage this better if my arms were free," he said presently, his lips in the curve of her throat. "If you don't mind—"

"Oh, can you ever forgive me! Oh, Boone Ransom!"

She was behind him now, unlocking the cuffs, and her fingers fleetingly seized and caressed his wrists where they were scored with red marks. She tossed the bracelets away.

"I never want to see you again," she told them as they whirled jingling over the top of the hut. She never did, either.

Already he was mounting the palisade. He edged along the rocks until he was above where Cyphers's rifle lay, and peered over.

"I see him," he called down to her, "what's left of him. He's lying face down on that second shelf. It's a drop from here of nearly a thousand feet—he may have been dead before he struck. I can tell, I think, where he crashed through a scrub pine that sticks out of a cranny about half-way down. Anyway there he is and there he'll stay forever. The carrion birds will be coming after a while and they'll pick his bones. But no human being ever will get nearer to him than I am right now. Very good ride, I call it," he added, climbing nimbly down to where she stood. "He was bad all through, was my late unlamented stepuncle by marriage. Well, what's next?" He asked it, as one might say, blithely. He had youth, and youth has buoyancy and sometimes has thought only for the present moment.

She went closer to him, and a very appealing figure of penitence she made as she said:

"Boone Ransom, I have a right to ask it: Why did you—you of all men in this world—why did you rob that train?"

"Seeing that you put it that way I reckon maybe you have got the right," he said, and inside her his recaptured drawling tone of friendliness made a pleasant fluttering. "Do you remember just the other day—Saturday it was—that I was telling you how my people came to be stranded out here in the West?"

"Of course I do. Your telling of it made me sad—it was such a pitiful tragedy."

"Well, your client, this man who calls himself Herbert Tendon was—"

"Don't call him my client! Can't you see that that employment is all behind me—that so far as I am concerned it's over and done with forever?" A light was beginning to break on her. "But go on—please, please go on. I'll not interrupt any more."

"So?" His eyebrows quirked gleefully. "Then perhaps I'd better not refer again to him as your client. But I hope you'll not mind if I do refer to him as one of the blackest-hearted little rogues that ever encumbered this earth—especially as I don't know what his real name is. When I first saw him he called himself Treadway. Now he's Tendon, and I expect in the meanwhile he's had other aliases. Anyhow he's the same bunco-steerer who back yonder years ago engineered the crooked scheme which ruined our neighborhood and indirectly started a host tracking off two thousand miles or more to make a new beginning in the desert.

"I never saw him but once or twice and I was only a shaver then, but I never forgot him. I made up my mind that I'd never forget him—in case some day, somewhere, the chance came to even the score with him for what he'd done to my poor simple-minded people.

“Well, about ten days ago or so that chance came. On the main street of Gateway I met him face to face—and knew him. My first impulse was to expose him—to proclaim it everywhere that this Little Giant before whom everybody there bowed down and worshiped was a professional trickster plotting to rob them by a scheme similar, in a way, to the scheme through which we, years and years before, had been beggared. Then it occurred to me that I might need proof other than my own unsupported word to confirm the charges. So I started hot-foot for the Mallard’s Nest to bring witnesses.

“Less than five miles out from town, though, a second thought came to me and it was on that thought I acted—to my own undoing. I turned around and hurried back, and taking nobody into my confidence I did a little private investigating. Pretending to be a curious yokel out sight-seeing, I got aboard Tendon’s car. I found out that he was very fussy regarding the contents of a little safe set into the wall of the car. That part was easy—the negro cook pointed it out to me. It was generally reported in Gateway that Tendon carried large sums in currency with him. I’d already heard that in half a dozen quarters.

“Briefly, my new idea was that I’d stop the train taking the car away—it was scheduled to leave on a

Sunday morning—and intimidate those on the car and force Tendon to open the safe for me. If there was money aboard it was money which should be confiscated for the benefit of my own people. Rightfully it belonged to them, I figured—just so much back interest on an unjust bet long past due. I didn't mean to keep any of it for myself.

“If I got away with the job—without being caught or detected, I mean—I was going to bide my time until the excitement had abated, then divide the money among the neediest of the families down in the cove; they could be trusted to keep their mouths shut. As I saw it, it would be no more than delayed justice, partial retribution on an oily little thief. And it would be killing two birds with one stone—for in case there were no incriminating evidence against him in the safe, though that seemed probable, there still would be abundant time for a delegation of our people, headed by Anse and made up of some of the older ones, to drop into Gateway, seemingly by chance, and to confront Tendon if he still was there; or if he had gone, to offer the testimony which would save the Gateway people from being fleeced as they—Anse and the rest—once had been fleeced.

“I realize now when it's too late that what I should have done was to accuse him on the spot. He would have denied my story, of course, but with his past

record he would never have dared face an inquiry. He'd have sneaked away. But the plan of holding up that train all by myself—well, I reckon it appealed to some latent strain of lawlessness in me. I drove out to the Nest. I confabbed with Anse—for a share in the prospective spoils he was ready to do anything—and arranged with him to provision this secret camp and to keep me posted by his windmill signals in case anything went wrong and I had to go into hiding.

"You know the rest. Something did happen. I halted the train, I cleaned out the safe, I got away without being damaged myself and without damaging anyone else—but I was recognized. I ran for my stronghold up here on Shivery Peak and then—"

"Chivalry Peak," she corrected.

"Up here I've been ever since, with complications thickening too fast for me to attempt any retaliation against Tendon even if I had been able to devise any. My main concern, for the time being, was to protect myself. And then you came and—well, I reckon that's about all except for these latter chapters in which you've taken part yourself. . . . No, it isn't all either. On top of the setback of being identified, I suffered another disappointment. It would have been a still greater disappointment to Anse if only he had lived to realize it. There was no money in Tendon's safe—not a penny."

“But he said—”

“I know what he said. He had to say it. How could he admit that his famous safe contained nothing but documents—letters, papers, a signed compact, among other things—which, placed in the proper hands, would mean his ruination? He couldn’t, that’s all. To justify the amount of the reward he was offering, to cover up his own dangerous position, he had to claim a big sum had been carried off. Besides, as I see it, he wanted to stimulate the man-hunters to a point where they would go to any ends to kill or capture me and get back those supposed valuables of his before I or anyone else had an opportunity—always admitting that we understood their true nature—to use them against him.”

“Oh, Boone Ransom!” she lamented. “Why did you keep me in the dark about all this and about that other dreadful thing? Oh, if only you had told me before I visited ignominy on you and on myself, too!”

“Can’t you see, Joan, that I didn’t want to offer you even a partial alibi—if that’s the right name for it—since I had no way of knowing whether you in return could explain away the accusation that I believed had been brought against you?”

“You were trying to spare me, even then. And I was blind—blind! I chose to think the worst of you.

You thought the best of me. I'm so ashamed, so remorseful. What can I say in atonement—what can I do? Tell me!"

"Besides," he went on in an effort to appease and console her, "there was that solemn contract made that first day between us that while we were here together neither would bring up the other's past. . . . You merely lived up to your pledge, that was all. So you mustn't feel distressed over a development which largely was my fault. . . . Where was I? Oh, yes. When you've really had the time to look through those papers where you dropped them just yonder on the ground you'll comprehend better what I'm driving at.

"As nearly as I can con it out Tendon and another crook called Bullard were engaged some three years ago in some nefarious get-rich-quick scheme or other which put them in danger of prosecution for misusing the United States mails. There was a third man in the plot but he died, leaving these two. Then, as nearly as I can tell, Bullard and Tendon fell out and became enemies. But before that, for purposes of individual self-protection—it seems neither ever did fully trust his accomplice—each gave to the other a sort of confession that he solely was responsible for the thievery. At least that's what I gather. No doubt each felt that with this signed admission of guilt in his possession he was safe from blackmail

or exposure at the hands of the other—so long as he kept it.

“I don’t know why Tendon didn’t file Bullard’s confession in a safety-deposit box somewhere. Maybe he regarded it as a sort of charm or talisman—they say professional thieves are apt to be superstitious. Anyhow he brought it with him when he came out to Gateway—and I got it away from him and now you get it away from me. Perhaps, just to make everything shipshape you’d better examine those papers now—they’re nearly all interesting and some of them are incriminating—so that—”

She threw up her hand to check him.

“I think probably those documents may be valuable later on,” she said significantly. “In fact, I think I know how they may be used to considerable advantage. But now at this minute the main thing for us to think of, the only thing for us to think of, is how you are to get away.”

“Get away?” His voice was incredulous.

“Yes, get away while there’s still a chance to undo this cruel, treacherous, disgraceful thing that I’ve done.”

“But, Joan,” he told her, and she could tell that his compassion was all for her, “but, Joan, it’s too late for that. I’m licked. Aside from every other consideration I must stay and take my licking.”

"But why must you stay? Boone, I want you to go—want it more than I've ever wanted anything in my life before."

"Here's why I must stay: what explanation could you make to those men when they climb up this mountain and find you alone?"

"Leave that to me."

"For the sake of argument concede that point. Even so, there's a still greater obstacle in the way. They're on the way here now, some of them—they must have heard this firing. How can I get past them without killing some of them or running the risk of being killed myself? There are reasons, Joan, why I'd like to go on living a while; why I don't want to get any worse embroiled in trouble than I already am as a result of my recent foolhardiness. Can't you guess what these reasons are, Joan?"

She chose to parry his stroke.

"Why can't you hide off the trail but within hearing distance until they have passed and then slip down to the foot and get a horse or a car and ride away? Or else hide among your kinspeople temporarily—I mean until the sheriff and his force have gone?"

"You forget one factor," he said, "and that factor you've just hinted at. It's Jeff Rowley. Jeff is no fool. If I'm not found here he'll rake the settlement

with fine-tooth combs for me. Either he'll catch me hidden in a house or a stable somewhere or he'll drive me out of hiding ahead of him—and then I must face those guards of his on beyond at the mouth of the cove. Jeff is too wise to drop all his precautions until the bird has been nabbed and its wings clipped. A thousand to one it would still be a shooting matter—with the cards all stacked against me. No, Joan, it's hopeless. Don't you see how hopeless it is? To your brother you might explain away my absence. How are you going to explain it to Rowley?"

"But I can—I can explain it!" Her voice clarified. "That dead man down below us on that inaccessible ledge—he's your substitute."

"My what?"

"Don't you see, won't you see? When those men come—my brother and Rowley and the rest—they find me here alone. I tell them that, when by trickery I had disarmed you, you still tried to escape—that, seeing I had you cut off from the entrance, you climbed up the rim-rock, meaning to circle it and reach the trail; that then I fired once, hoping to stop you, you dodged and slipped and fell—and there, a thousand feet beneath their eyes, your mangled body is lying. They can't discount that evidence, nor the fact that I have possession of Tendon's envelops and portfolios. They're bound to accept my story.

“Julian is another matter; I’ll deal with him later and in private. Oh, they’ll believe me. I’ll show them play-acting which would convince shrewder men than they are. They’ll pack and go away and before Cyphers is reported as missing, you’ll have your chance. Oh, Boone, won’t you take it?”

“I certainly will!” he cried, and on that, without realization by her of just how it had happened, Joan found herself in his arms—and was sobbing, with her face against the comforting scratchiness of his shirt.

XXIV

Revelations

HOW long she nestled in the security of his enfolding arms—that was another thing regarding which Joan subsequently was uncertain. She only knew she was very, very glad to be there, glad to press closer and to feel an answering pressure, glad of the chance to have her crying spell out. It was what he said that brought her back to realities.

“Life’s funny, isn’t it?” he was saying. “Wicked old Anse had to die before he could serve any decent purpose in this world. So I’ll follow your plan—on one condition.”

“Condition?” she repeated, and drew back, fearful for him. “What condition can there be?” Renewing alarm gave her panic. “You’re not going to hesitate or temporize now? Boone, you mustn’t. You shan’t!”

“One condition!” he reaffirmed.

“But surely you can trust me to protect your interests as well as I can. Those documents now—with them in my possession and with Julian to help—

I know he will help—we'll have this sharper Tendon in our power. It's not the reward I'm thinking of; you know that; it's the hold we'll have on him. He'll be only too glad to make any concessions we demand. And he won't dare go any further with his scheme for defrauding these people here—if that's what you are thinking of."

"That's not the issue now," he answered. "I figure we can checkmate Tendon whenever we're ready and before he's had time to do any real harm. From the hour when I first went through his stack of papers I felt sure I could make terms with him. All I had to do was to send to him some trustworthy messenger from down in the cove—my sister would have served—with the word that I was ready to swap on the basis of immunity from prosecution for me as against the surrender of his belongings to him. That would have been comparatively easy. He'd jump at the chance to close the bargain; I was certain of it. And I'll admit it was a temptation. But I put it aside. Since I had gone so far I made up my mind I'd go all the way. If I succeeded in outwitting the pursuit I could use my evidence on him from a distance. And if I lost—if they got me—why, I said to myself, 'Well, Boone, you may go to jail then but you'll probably take somebody along with you. And if that somebody is Tendon—and it will be—what's the differ-

ence?" There's been a sort of fascination about playing this game out lone-handed and against odds. Now the fascination is gone but the prospect for making Br'er Tendon exceedingly unhappy is just as good as it ever was—perhaps better than it ever was."

"Then what is your condition?"

"I'll come to that in a minute. Now I'm fixing to ask you a question or two. Here's the first one: why did you kiss me a while ago when I was hitched to that pine tree?"

Sudden confusion covered her. She faltered and stammered:

"Why—gratitude for what you had done in my behalf. And—and—repentance for what I'd done to you. That most of all, I think."

He held her away from him, hungrily searching her flushed face.

"And why, just a moment ago, did you let me take you in my arms and hold you there?"

"I scarcely realized—so much has happened these last few minutes—oh, what makes you ask me those things? Can't you see that I—Boone Ransom, can't you see anything at all!" She stamped an impatient foot.

"I'm almost through with my questions. There's only one more: Joan, do you believe in love at first sight?"

"I—I—don't know. But there's one thing I do know." She faced him bravely. "I believe in love at second sight—when—when a girl—I mean when a person who has been blind finally gets her—I should say their eyes open."

"Joan," he said, and his grip on her shoulders tightened until it hurt her deliciously, "Joan Powers, I'm mad to ask what I'm about to ask, circumstanced as I am, penniless as I am. I'm still a fugitive from justice—think of that before you answer. A serious charge still is hanging over my head. I may get clear of this mess—something tells me that I will get clear of it, somehow, some way. But in that I may be deceiving myself. When I do get clear of it—if I do—I'll be as poor as they make 'em."

"There was a job open to me before I got into this snarl—foreman at the Bent Y; remember, I was telling you about that? Whether in view of what's happened it may still be open to me I can't say, but Bastrop, the owner, is a good liberal-minded scout and he likes me. If it is open, I'm going to take it. If it's not, I'll work at whatever honest toil I can put my hands to. It may mean starting somewhere at the very bottom. Then there's my disposition—I'm very high-tempered."

"Don't I know it!" This in a muffled undertone from Joan.

"I use rough language when I'm excited or angry."

"Know that, too"—three murmured words.

"I'm full of faults. I'm a Kentucky mountaineer and I run true to my breeding. I'm dictatorial; I like to have my own way. I'm probably a very hard person to get along with for any length of time."

"Most normal women like to be bossed—within reason." She whispered it to herself, but he heard.

"There's my confession," he went on. "Now then, here's my condition: I'll go, Joan—if you'll be waiting for me somewhere when I get out of this trouble—if I do get out of it. Otherwise I don't stir an inch. Take your time to think it over before you answer. Because, remember this, when you answer it's for good and all, it's forever and ever, Joan. . . . Well, honey, what's the verdict?"

She did not reply in words. She did it with her body. She swayed toward him, her figure curved and yielding, her face uplifted to his, her eyes brimming but bright as gray jewels through the tears.

Some minutes later—it seems foolish though to be clocking the time for a scene such as this—some minutes later Joan spoke, and by reason of her lips being otherwise engaged in the pauses, she spoke chokily and in interrupted fragments.

"Life is funny!" quoth Joan. "Life—is—awfully, awfully funny. Here it seems I've gone and went and

got myself—engaged!” It was apparently no occasion calling for the niceties of grammar. “Yes, Mr. Robinson Crusoe, I’m engaged—to—to—a comparative stranger, as you might say. And I haven’t even been made love to!”

“Why, sweetheart,” he said, “I’ve been making love to you ever since I laid eyes on you.”

“That,” she opined, “is the trouble with amateurs. An amateur lover can’t express his emotions. An amateur detective can’t read them. Boone, let’s both quit being amateurs.”

Again it is necessary, even at the risk of being unduly fussy, to deal chronologically with the passage of events. A half-hour passed while the autumnal morning glowed and richened about these two; but what words passed between them, what prophecies were made, what dreams were dreamed, what horoscopes were cast—well, those matters are neither the writer’s business nor, if it comes down to that, the reader’s.

“They’ll be here before very long,” said Boone at length, descending temporarily from where he had been up yonder in the clouds with his head among the friendly stars. “I’ll have to go.”

“Don’t go very far,” she counseled. “There may be a chance to see you again after they come. Maybe,

on some pretext or other, I can delay starting down until the others—all except Julian—have started.”

“And a very pious notion that is,” he commended. “Because there are a million things I want to say to you. No, I’m wrong. There’s one thing—just three words in all—that I want to say to you a million times, over and over again. Still”—he seemed to reflect—“I’m going to have a whole lifetime for saying it—and proving it—and living it. . . . How about my waiting just below here at our swimming pool? Just call out if the opportunity comes and I’ll be listening.”

“I have an accomplishment of which you know nothing. I can put my two little fingers in my mouth and whistle.”

“Marvelous gift. By a strange coincidence I also can whistle.”

He was pulling away the stones of the barricade, flinging them aside as though they were chips, when a thought occurred to him.

“Maybe I’m starting off too soon,” he called to her where she stood watching his labors. “Your brother may know where the foot of our trail is. But how about that tangle of jack-pines just below the stair-steps leading to the watch-tower? If I’m any judge, he’ll be stumped when he gets there.”

"Say you so?" she mocked. "Well then, let me tell you, Mister Smarty, that I'm not quite so stupid as I may look. Day before yesterday after I left you I put markers there to show the way—plenty of them. That was what detained me so long in that jungle."

"Well, I'll be ——"

"I made them though where I was sure you wouldn't stumble on them even in broad daylight—a roundabout way. I tried to be crafty."

"I didn't see them either," he confessed. "But then you'll please remember that I had other things to think about yesterday."

She was hurrying on:

"It was after I got up here that evening and was all by myself and had a chance to reason things out alone that I decided I'd never betray you. Then I was sorry I'd made those signs—but it was too late. Now I'm glad they're still there—they'll help to bring Julian all the quicker."

He threw back his head and gave a great hearty laugh of sincerest admiration.

"Why, you conniving, adorable, darling, wonderful little damn Yankee!" he exclaimed.

"Come here," she commanded masterfully. "Come here to me and say that again—but leave out the 'conniving.' All the rest of it I like. Oh, Boone Ransom, how I do like it!"

When Julian Clyde swung into and up the last steep lap of the roundabout stony path, he being breathless and perturbed, it was nearly nine o'clock. Joan, having finished her inventory of the Tendon dossier and having docketed its contents for future reference, was cradled in the roots of the leaning pine. Her gaze was set absently on the skyline; mentally she was rehearsing her lines for the play-acting she must do. Frequently one hand would touch affectionately the roughened bark of the tree as though that resinous surface had for her a certain sentiment.

She caught the clatter of the newcomer's tread upon the shale and she was standing, waiting for him, as her half-brother hurried through the opening. Anxiety was written in his look; relief succeeded it.

"Sis, are you all right?" he demanded.

"Never in all my life was I so absolutely all right in every possible regard," she told him.

He ran up to her, panting, and kissed her.

"I've been terribly worried ever since I let you start on this harebrained venture," he admitted. "I reproached myself a thousand times for having let you tackle it. And then—three hours ago—when I heard the signal—well, it took years off my life, I tell you that. But say"—he was sweeping the little circle within the coroneted rim with a swift scrutiny—"but say, Sis, where's our man?"

"Never mind that for a minute," she countered. "He can be produced when required." She spoke fast: "Where are the others? How far behind you are they, I mean?"

"There aren't any others," he said half ruefully.

"But the sheriff and his men. I thought—"

"Sis," said Clyde, "I've got a disappointment for you, I'm afraid. The sheriff and his outfit—they pulled up stakes last night and quit. But the sheriff left a message to be delivered when the chance came and I brought it—that and some news. Sis, prepare yourself for a shock. All our scheming and planning, all my distress over you, all your work here on this mountain, all our hopes of dividing a share of that fat reward—they've gone for naught."

She clutched at his sleeve, her eyes alight.

"What do you mean?"

"It's quite a yarn but I'll try to boil it down. It seems that yesterday morning the city papers through this section—and all over the country, too, probably, because the Associated Press carried it—came out with a scare-headed exposé of our friend Tendon. From what I can gather he had a former pal somewhere in the East who turned on him and tipped the newspapers off to the fact that Tendon was a bad egg, a very bad, very smelly, very disreputable egg indeed."

"I knew about that."

"You knew about it?" His eyebrows rose in surprise. "Why, how could you away up here on this peak know anything about—"

"Never mind that. Go on, go on!"

"It seems also that a paper in Seattle, working on its own hook, had begun to suspect Tendon might not exactly be all he pretended to be and it rushed a correspondent over to Gateway to have a talk with Tendon, and the copy that man got helped to confirm the dispatch that was telegraphed across from New York—anyhow the story was smeared all over the front pages of Sunday's papers up and down the Coast. And someone in Portland raised Gateway on long distance before the papers arrived there and spilled the beans, and in twenty minutes the whole town was on fire with rage and disappointment.

"Tendon must have had private sources of telephone information of his own. For when a delegation dropped around to his hotel to ask him a few pointed questions he'd already beaten it in a hired automobile for Pekawa Junction and parts unknown. It was just as well for him that he went when he did—I hear there was considerable talk about tar and feathers and a ride on a rail.

"So, Sis, he's gone—and he isn't expected back. And there'll be no reward. On top of these develop-

ments a messenger lit out for the Mallard's Nest with the big news. And honestly I'm sure the sheriff was relieved at getting it. At heart I think he never had any taste for this job he was on—he liked Ransom and he didn't like Tendon a dime's worth. So he disbanded his squad and they all left, and a disagreeable party named Doheny who's been snooping around—he likewise left.

“But before the sheriff started for home he told me, in case, through you or otherwise, contact was established with Ransom, that he sent Ransom his congratulations and best wishes because, you see, if it hadn't been for Ransom's hold-up of the train Tendon might have filched no telling how many thousands of dollars out of this county. The hold-up, really, was what precipitated the exposure.

“The Gateway people are sore, naturally, at being made fools of, but they are grateful that they weren't made suckers of, besides. As Rowley said to me, he'd bet all he had that the next grand jury won't draw any indictment against Ransom; it's more likely they'll offer a vote of thanks to him as a public benefactor. Rowley says he'd like to help organize a testimonial dinner for Ransom in order to show the real feelings of the community. And so the prodigal is forgiven and can return to his old stamping-grounds and we—you and I, I mean—we are left in the lurch.”

"Oh, Julian," she burst out, "I'm so glad!"

"*Humph!* Have you fallen for this popular and dashing malefactor's charms along with the rest? I've heard he was a likable chap but—say, look here, Sis, what's behind all this sudden jubilation of yours anyhow? I figured you'd be downcast."

"Julian, it means for one thing that I can quit lying. And I'm so tired of lying. And it means something else—a very great something to me and to you too, I'm hoping."

"But your man—where is he?"

"You said it, Julian dear—*my* man. Wait just one minute."

She kissed him again fervently; she ran to the gate; she poised between the rocky pillars and whistled shrilly. A whistle came back in answer.

"Oh, Robin Hood!" she hailed, and there was a flood of pulsing sweetness in her hail. "Oh, you Robin Hood Robinson Crusoe Ransom!"

"Yes."

"Your Lady Man Friday wants you," she called. "She wants you to meet your future half-brother-in-law."

"Coming!"—a jubilant shout.

She could hear his eager feet spurning the shaly trail to her.

THE END

